

MABEL LEE AND LOUISE POUND:
THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA'S BATTLE OVER
WOMEN'S INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

ILT Kristi Lowenthal, USAF

M.A., University of Nebraska, 1999 (121 pages)

Mirroring a cultural shift that brought the American middle class from the Victorian era into the modern era, women's intercollegiate sports encountered stiff resistance from the two overlapping social groups. Mabel Lee, a woman physical educator, brought firmly held Victorian beliefs about feminine propriety and moderation to the University of Nebraska when she was hired as the head of the women's physical education department in 1924. Louise Pound, an English professor at the University, had for years excelled in highly competitive athletics as a member of the new modern middle class. Pound flouted Victorian restraints and refused to enter the women's "separate sphere" of household duties, choosing instead to defeat both men and women at golf, tennis, cycling, and a variety of other sports. Lee rejected intercollegiate sports for women, finding them intemperate, elitist, and socially suspect. Pound rejected Lee's substituted intramural sports as boring and weak. The two women turned their professional disagreement into a life-long feud, involving their friends and colleagues as allies against each other.

The main sources used for this thesis include, but are not limited to, the following:

Memories Beyond Bloomers by Mabel Lee, Coming On Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport by Susan Cahn, and Saga of American Sport by John A. Lucas and Ronald A. Smith.

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A
Approved for Public Release
Distribution Unlimited

DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 4

19990907 165

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188), Washington, DC 20503.

1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)	2. REPORT DATE	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED	
	12.Aug.99	THESIS	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE		5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
MABEL LEE AND LOUISE POUND: THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA'S BATTLE OVER WOMEN'S INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS			
6. AUTHOR(S)		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
2D LT LOWENTHAL KRISTI			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT LINCOLN		FY99-270	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE AFIT/CIA, BLDG 125 2950 P STREET WPAFB OH 45433			
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES			
12a. DISTRIBUTION AVAILABILITY STATEMENT		12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
Unlimited distribution In Accordance With AFI 35-205/AFIT Sup 1			
13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words)			
14. SUBJECT TERMS		15. NUMBER OF PAGES	
		121	
		16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT

MABEL LEE AND LOUISE POUND:
THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA'S BATTLE OVER
WOMEN'S INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

by

Kristi Lowenthal

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: History

Under the Supervision of Professor Benjamin G. Rader

Lincoln, Nebraska

July, 1999

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the great amounts of help I received from Dr. Robert Knoll, University of Nebraska professor emeritus and personal friend of Louise Pound; Mrs. Ruth Diamond Levinson, former physical educator and student of Mabel Lee; Mr. Ron Powell from the Lincoln Journal Star, Ms. Deborah Lyons of the University of Nebraska archives in Love Library, and Ms. Anne Billesbach of the Nebraska State Historical Society.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	3
ABSTRACT	5
INTRODUCTION	7
1. MABEL LEE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HER NON-COMPETITIVE SPORT PHILOSOPHY	12
2. LOUISE POUND AND HER COMPETITIVE DRIVE	45
3. MABEL LEE AND LOUISE POUND MEET: DISCORD ON CAMPUS	75
BIBLIOGRAPHY	116

MABEL LEE AND LOUISE POUND:
THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA'S BATTLE OVER
WOMEN'S INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

Kristi Lowenthal, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 1999

Adviser: Benjamin G. Rader

Mirroring a cultural shift that brought the American middle class from the Victorian era into the modern era, women's intercollegiate sports encountered stiff resistance from the two overlapping social groups. Mabel Lee, a woman physical educator, brought firmly held Victorian beliefs about feminine propriety and moderation to the University of Nebraska when she was hired as the head of the women's physical education department in 1924. Louise Pound, an English professor at the University, had for years excelled in highly competitive athletics as a member of the new modern middle class. Pound flouted Victorian restraints and refused to enter the women's "separate sphere" of household duties, choosing instead to defeat both men and women at golf, tennis, cycling, and a variety of different sports.

Lee rejected intercollegiate sports for women, finding them intemperate, elitist, and socially suspect. Pound rejected Lee's substituted intramural sports as boring and weak. The two women turned their professional disagreement into a life-long feud, involving their friends and colleagues as allies against each other. Lee maintained numerous objections to intercollegiate sport. First, she thought women's varsity sports

would encounter the same evils as men's varsity sports, namely, a "win-at-all-costs" attitude, special privileges for star athletes, and relaxed academic standards. Second, she refused to give up any of her hard-won turf as a woman physical educator to male coaches and administrators of women's varsity teams. Third, Lee feared that varsity sports would skim off the best women, leaving her department with only the weak or the disinterested.

Backed by her professional physical education organizations, Lee and her Victorian sports philosophy triumphed early as she persuading large numbers of colleges to abandon intercollegiate athletics for women in favor of intramural contests moderated by professional women physical educators like herself. Although Pound died in 1958, her modern view of uninhibited sports for women was eventually vindicated by Title IX, relegating Lee's beloved physical education once again to the fringes of academic institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Victorian America died slowly in the first decades of the twentieth century as a new, modern middle class expanded. In the 1920s, these two vastly dissimilar middle class social groups clashed at the University of Nebraska through the persons of Mabel Lee and Louise Pound. As the Victorian values of self-control and delayed gratification waned, Americans embraced previously frowned-upon recreation and leisure activities. Middle and upper class women, freed from the “separate sphere” of the home, discovered sports for the first time. On college campuses, enthusiastic women clamoring for their own intercollegiate athletics presented a cultural problem for the overlapping Victorians and new middle class.

Coming from a Victorian background, physical educator Mabel Lee encouraged women to take up moderate intramural sports instead of problematic male-patterned varsity competition. English professor Louise Pound, a woman of the new middle class, excelled in every athletic endeavor she ever tried and encouraged women to take up rough but thrilling intercollegiate sports. When the University of Nebraska hired Mabel Lee as the head of the physical education department in 1924, Lee and Pound clashed over the direction of women’s athletics. Stemming from their dissimilar social values, the two women’s opposing views on women’s sports bloomed into a life-long feud.

Mabel Lee developed a non-competitive view of women’s sports during her childhood, college, and early teaching years. She learned and maintained a Victorian concept of femininity which dictated that women were the “weaker sex” and that

improper athletic activities could have grave consequences. Lee's opinion was corroborated by medical experts of the day, who warned women that too vigorous exertion in athletics could result in physical incapacity, emotional breakdown, moral looseness, and social exclusion. Lee insisted that her physical education students maintain their traditional feminine grace and charm while shunning the "mannishness" that she feared could come from excessively competitive sports or rough play.

Although Lee's Victorian outlook formed the basis of her objection to women's competitive sports, she also had many genuine reservations about intercollegiate athletics in general. First, Lee believed that women's varsity sports would develop the same problems that plagued men's varsity sports, such as a "win-at-all-cost" attitude, special privileges for star athletes, and a relaxation of athletes' academic standards. Second, women physical educators, with Lee at the forefront as a leader in their professional organizations, had fought for decades to exclusively control women's athletics within colleges. These women were therefore loathe to give up any of their turf to the predominantly male coaches and sports administrators needed for varsity women's teams. Third, Lee feared that varsity sports would skim off the most talented girls and leave women physical educators with only the weaker or disinterested girls, thus shrinking their hard-won influence. Seeking the middle road for all women, Lee believed that only a carefully structured physical education program consisting of uniformly moderate, restrained exercises and games led by professionally-trained women physical educators could avert both evils of intercollegiate sports for exceptionally athletic girls and the invalidism of weak or lazy girls.

Louise Pound, on the other hand, came from a different school. As members of the new American middle class, the Pound family strayed from Victorian restraints. Judge Stephen Pound led his family in dancing and parties and encouraged his athletic daughter to pursue all of her sporting interests as an exciting adventure. As one of Lincoln's first "new women," Louise Pound reigned, unofficially, the nation's top ranked female tennis player while serving as a professor in the English department at the University of Nebraska. During the late 1890s and early 1900s, she coached, managed, and played with the budding girls' basketball team. After only a few seasons, Pound's team looked beyond the gymnasium walls for opponents, taking on teams from around the state in lively intercollegiate matches.

Ignoring conservative medical and social opinions of the day, Pound played all sports with abandon, worrying about neither health nor propriety in her quest to become the best. She especially took joy in defeating men at their own games with their own rules. She believed that women's deficiencies in sports as compared to men came not from physical differences, but from outdated Victorian social strictures prohibiting women from entering into vigorous activities. She found sports deeply satisfying but enjoyed the fame and honors of her sporting excellence even more. Pound rejected physical educators' desire for "play for play's sake" as a weak and bloodless version of the highly competitive sports she enjoyed so much.

Because of their dissimilar backgrounds as Victorian and new middle class, Lee and Pound developed intractable positions on women's sports that were mutually exclusive. Lee believed that intercollegiate sports were harmful to women in a variety of

ways and favored milder physical education classes and intramural sports as the answer to women's fitness needs. Pound believed that physical education and intramural sports were for "sissies" and hoped that college women would pursue highly competitive intercollegiate, national, and international sporting events as men had always done. The two women, refusing to compromise, each perpetuated their own narrow viewpoints at the expense of the undergraduates they hoped to vindicate. Pound did not care about the physical development of weaker girls who could not make intercollegiate teams, conversely, Lee felt that the small groups of girls who wished to form intercollegiate teams in search of greater athletic success could be satisfied with watered-down versions of intramural basketball, field hockey, and calisthenics.

Both stubborn women, Lee and Pound could not leave each other alone once they found a rival on campus. They continued goading and harassing each other throughout their careers and into retirement. The animosity between the women grew until everyone on campus knew of the women's distaste for each other. Mostly existing through rumors and gossip, however, their feud is not well documented. The only material on most of the incidents between the women comes from the second volume of Mabel Lee's autobiography, Memories Beyond Bloomers (1978). Always well-mannered, Lee never directly names Pound but adequately describes the "noted sportswoman from another department" as her life-long antagonist. Unfortunately, Pound never wrote a memoir and her professional writings make no mention of her athletic career or her conflict with Lee. Despite the dearth of information on this episode, Lee and Pound's fight over women's

intercollegiate sports illustrated one facet of America's shift from conservative Victorian values to a new, modern outlook.

CHAPTER 1: MABEL LEE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HER NON-COMPETITIVE SPORT PHILOSOPHY

Mabel Lee, a leader in the women's physical education profession during the early twentieth century, helped to shape the direction of American women's athletics from her post at the University of Nebraska, where she served as the head of the women's physical education department from 1924-1952. Molded by her upbringing, her professional education, and times, Mabel Lee and her physical education colleagues succeeded in convincing the nation that women should not engage in competitive or intercollegiate athletics, lest they damage their health, emotions, morals, or social charm. Born in 1886, Lee grew up at the tail end of the Victorian era, picking up and perpetuating many of the societal norms held by the Victorians of her parents' generation. A poor athlete herself, Lee advocated the inclusion of all women in physical education activities and actively quashed attempts by more highly skilled girls to organize varsity teams for intercollegiate competition. Lee graduated from a prestigious women's physical education school in Boston which offered mild physical activities for its students, guarding them against the suspected physical harms that might result from highly competitive athletics. Instead of athletic skill, the school stressed posture, grace, and professionalism for its future physical educators.

Lee learned early on that men's athletics existed for completely different reasons than did women's physical education. While men's sports emphasized winning (especially over school rivals), individual stars, and athletic skill, Lee's idealized physical

activities for women advocated socialization, play for all, and non-competition. She believed that women's activities should be directed toward overall health and camaraderie, while men's activities perverted exercise into gladiatorial contests where some would receive adulation while others, unable to make varsity teams, remained on the sidelines, ignorant of the benefits of physical culture. To further her beliefs, she firmly insisted upon democracy in physical education (all girls should have an opportunity to play every game) and joined professional organizations controlled by women with similar beliefs.

As a member of one of the first generations of women physical educators, Lee felt defensive all of her life. During her long career, she constantly perceived threats to her authority as the head of the women's physical education department in various colleges and universities. She called most colleagues who agreed with her opinions "friends" and those who disagreed with her "bitter rivals." Territorial about her profession, Lee always insisted that formally-trained women alone could understand the physical and moral education needs of women students. Protecting her turf until the end, when intercollegiate athletics for women finally established themselves in mainstream American culture in the late 1970s and 1980s, she advocated that physical education departments should control the conduct of these activities which had been anathema to physical educators only years before.

As Lee's Victorian views became more and more outdated, she wrote an autobiography to explain her sport philosophy. The result of that effort, the two-volume work Memories of a Bloomer Girl (1977) and sequel Memories Beyond Bloomers (1978)

uses Mabel Lee's life as a backdrop but actually tells the story of her physical education philosophy; how it was formed, what events contributed to it, and how she fought to preserve her ideals. She writes of her childhood and college years as if her physical education philosophy had always existed, fully formed, when it probably took years of professional schooling and teaching for her to develop her style. Her books, therefore, are less of an autobiography and more of a manifesto. Viewing intercollegiate athletics and physical education as rival interests competing for money and facilities, she believed that one philosophy would eventually triumph over the other. She saw physical education as the only logical choice for women's athletics, providing the greatest good for the greatest number; varsity sports provided a lesser good for the elite few.

Victorian Social Norms

As women earned more and more freedoms in the first decades of the twentieth century, athletics became a new avenue of expression. Society, however, was unsure of how to deal with female athletes. Victorian women had shunned all physical effort, as a 1927 newspaper article recalled: "In mother's day, a very mild, ladylike game of tennis was her greatest physical exertion. Her costume, with its resultant constriction of herself, prevented her from more than gently batting the ball to her opponent. A walk was a stroll around the block, hatted and parasoled." Women could hardly engage in sports when simply breathing while ensconced in a tightly-laced corset was, in itself, a difficult feat: "Thirty years ago, mother counted that day lost whose low descending sun did not see at least one fainting spell well done. Perhaps it was her way of interpreting 'it' in 1895, but

it is certain that she fell into some man's arms, or lacking those, descended to the floor with as much grace as she could muster. Fainting was as much a part of her life as her pompadour."¹ To turn from the idealized female of the Victorian era complete with large bustle, small feet, long skirts, elaborate hair styles, pale skin, and an eighteen-inch waist to the Roaring Twenties' boyish, athletic girl constituted quite a shift in societal values. The change did not come easily, and holdouts from the passing Victorian age used several tools to justify their beliefs.

New York physical educator Frederick Rand Rogers attempted to dissuade women from engaging in athletics because of the dangers of aesthetic decline. In 1930, he said, "Games like basketball and baseball are combative sports. They develop ugly muscles—muscles ugly in girls—as well as scowling faces and the competitive spirit."² More common than Rogers' position was the belief that physical activity might somehow damage a woman's reproductive organs or make her unfit for motherhood. This view remained popular up to World War II. An article in Scientific American shortly before the war stated that "feminine muscular development interferes with motherhood."³ Others believed that all athletic activity should stop during menstruation. An Amateur Athletic Union-conducted study indicated, on the evidence of a woman doctor's opinion, that "competition during a woman's period might have a harmful effect upon a woman's capacity for 'being a normal mother.'"⁴ The lack of scientific evidence for these claims did not detract from the argument's power. Some women's athletic leaders admitted "We

¹ Lulu Mae Coe, "Physical Education Has Taught Nebraska Girls to Breathe and Sensible Reforms in Dress and Posture Have Resulted," Lincoln Sunday Star, 13 March 1927, sec. D.

² Lucas and Smith, 360.

³ *Ibid.*, 364.

can't actually put our finger on the harmful effect of too strenuous athletics on women,"⁵ but nevertheless continued to look upon physical exertion as inherently harmful or potentially immoral. By the turn of the century, most Victorian women believed that mild physical activity increased health but remained unsure as to how much activity was too much. Seeking to distance themselves from working class women's coarseness and the masculinity of the "muscle moll," Victorian women entered the sporting arena cautiously. Mabel Lee spent her life trying to reconcile the benefits of sports with her Victorian notion of feminine propriety.

Youth

Mabel Lee was born in Clearfield, Iowa, on 18 August 1886, the second of four sisters. The girls' father enjoyed success as a coal salesman while their mother stayed home and devoted herself to her children. According to the first volume of her autobiography, Memories of a Bloomer Girl, the early years of Lee's life greatly influenced her later ideas on sports and physical education. Turn-of-the-century Iowa contained little entertainment for children, so young Mabel and the other neighborhood children often met to play and amuse themselves informally. During the course of this play, the children developed games and activities; inventing rules, mixing teams, and having fun, oblivious to any formal rules (if any existed). Lee remembered their games: "It was . . . splendid for us to argue together and come to a decision as to what was fair and just to all. I can't recall that we ever kept scores of games. That is overdone by adult

⁴ Ibid.

pressures on children. What difference what the score or who won? It was just play, and we did it in a way that we liked."⁶ As a champion of "play for play's sake," Lee later used children's games as a model for cooperative play.

In the absence of organized athletics, Lee took to running. "I used to run round and round and none of the girls would ever run with me. I don't know why I wanted to do it. I just had the urge."⁷ One summer, the parents in Clearfield organized a track meet for their children. Lee practiced for the meet, but realized that she had no desire to enter it as a competitor. "I loved jumping and racing during the practice periods but had no interest in performing before an audience."⁸ Her enthusiasm for sports, although confined to play for her own enjoyment, often exceeded her physical capacity to engage in them. Contracting, at various times, typhoid, diphteria, measles, chicken pox, scarletina, and whooping cough, Lee would be forced to stop playing until she was well again.⁹ She would then throw herself headlong back into running, jumping over creeks, swinging on vines, and walking on fence rails. Though excited about sports, she was the "family weakling." "My three sisters could out-do me in golf, tennis, everything. I definitely was not a sports woman."¹⁰

As a child, Lee and her friends reveled in their unstructured activity. She came to look upon formalized youth activities as a menace:

⁵ Cahn, 62-63.

⁶ Mabel Lee, Memories of a Bloomer Girl (Washington, D.C.: The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, 1977), 29.

⁷ E.K. Casaccio, "The Incredible 'Lee:' In a Continuing Story," Daily Nebraskan 101 (18 November 1977), sec. B.

⁸ Lee, Bloomer Girl, 33.

⁹ Lee, Bloomer Girl, 26.

¹⁰ Don Pieper, "Fitness Expert Far From Being a 'Dud,'" Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 11 September 1983.

Fortunately we children had two important things going for us in our play life: first, a group of children in our neighborhood practically all of whom had a lot of initiative on their own, and second, parents who left us alone to create our own play life. How fortunate we were that there was no well-meaning service club, such as exists in so many American towns today, to take over the boys' play and organize little league teams, pushing boys into championship games, putting on the pressure to win, and overseeing the activity until all children-inspired efforts are drained away—efforts to pattern children after young adults and rob them of the natural birthright of their years. We knew nothing of little girls entering beauty contests; we were not sent to dancing school or pushed into highly competitive athletics. We were allowed to be unsophisticated and natural.¹¹

In a 1979 interview, Lee strongly condemned parents who pushed their children into organized sports, saying that "it's just wicked for parents to push their children into long hours of grueling sports just to bring honors to the parents. When a child finds a sport is work, not play, it's time to quit it."¹² Believing in the purity of play and the potential exploitation associated with sports, Lee attempted to model her later theories for women's athletics on the innocent play of small children.

When young Lee was a freshman in high school, an older friend home from college told her about the new sport of basketball, invented in 1891.¹³ Lee decided that her new school in Centerville, Iowa, must have its own intramural team for young

¹¹ Lee, Bloomer Girl, 37.

¹² Lynn Hawkins, "Lee to Be First Nebraskan Inducted by Iowa Hall of Fame," Lincoln Star, 20 August 1979.

¹³ Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 99, s.v. "basketball."

women. She talked to her father, and "he talked with the members of the school board, the superintendent of schools and the high school principal in my behalf, since my dreams encompassed all the high school girls, and at last as a sophomore in high school, practically singlehandedly with the aid of Father, I got basketball introduced in Centerville."¹⁴ According to Lee's autobiography, she interested herself in "all the high school girls" even at this early date, a philosophy that she would pursue for the rest of her career.

Traveling to intercollegiate games immediately became a weighty issue for the young Centerville High School team. When some coeds from Parsons College in Fairfield, Iowa, asked them to come to play basketball with them, Lee wrote back, "We girls are having all the fun we need playing here at home by ourselves and we will not come to play with you."¹⁵ Never reconciling herself to inter-school competition, she shunned competitive feelings rising when two rival teams played each other in favor of what she considered to be the filial, cooperative feelings nurtured through intramural contests.

Lee Discovers Physical Education

Finding little success or satisfaction in the scant sport opportunities for women at her high school, Lee turned to the debate club for stimulation. In the course of researching, organizing, preparing, and debating, Lee developed a philosophy concerning competition that followed her for the rest of her life. "I soon came to see that victories in

¹⁴ Lee, Bloomer Girl, 42.

themselves (and I had my share of them) were but a very unimportant part of the whole experience and the importance the noncombatants seemed to attach to them was to be discounted. It was the activity—the preparation and the debating—that I loved.”¹⁶ Translating her debating philosophy to sports, she reinforced her budding philosophy that accentuated practiced activities such as gymnastics and dancing but shrank from intercollegiate games or activities that often became spectator-packed performances. Graduating from high school in 1904, Lee looked forward to college that fall.

Lee’s mother had given up her desire to go to college when the family farm fell on hard times but insisted that her four daughters attend college and earn a four-year degree. Presbyterian-affiliated Coe College provided a moral environment relatively close by, and Lee soon found herself in the role of a coed. Women were still a relatively new fixture on college campuses in the twentieth century’s first decade, and many believed that Victorian women could not withstand the physical or emotional rigor of full-time academic study. To offset the supposed ill effects of a college environment on women, many campuses employed a female physical educator to oversee women’s physical activity and health needs. This woman would organize outings for the students and offer mild sporting activities like archery, tennis, or gymnastics.¹⁷

Intrigued by physical education, Lee became the gymnasium’s most devoted patron, but was unable to concentrate her studies in this area because Coe College did not offer physical education as a major. Woman physical educators needed to enroll in

¹⁵ Patrick Lackey, “Cedar Rapids Woman Still Fit at 89,” *Des Moines Register*, 29 May 1976.

¹⁶ Lee, *Bloomer Girl*, 43.

¹⁷ John A. Lucas and Ronald A. Smith, *Saga of American Sport* (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1978), 353.

specialized schools for their training, but Lee's parents encouraged her to remain at Coe until the completion of her degree instead of leaving early to pursue physical education elsewhere. While earning her undergraduate degree, Lee's interest in sports grew. In her sophomore year, she won the coveted Coe College "C," an award based on performance in various physical education activities including rope climb, relay race, traveling rings, and high jump (3' 9 1/2" was the record). She proudly wore the felt "C" on her sweater for her remaining two years at Coe.¹⁸ In addition to wearing the varsity "C," Lee also discovered field hockey and participated in some intercollegiate matches with Iowa State College in Ames and Cornell (of Iowa),¹⁹ both activities she would later condemn.

About the time Lee decided to become a physical educator, she also decided to remain unmarried. Unable to combine the societal urge for married women to stay in the home and her desire to be a lifelong physical educator, she chose her career over domestic life. Keenly aware of married women's truncated professional possibilities, she reflecting on one of her woman physical educator friends who married, saying, "Had she not married, she would without a doubt have made herself recognized both nationally and internationally in our field."²⁰ Often working over fifty hours per week, Lee came to define herself by her work, treating her physical education departments and her sports philosophy as a surrogate family.

Boston Normal School of Gymnastics

¹⁸ Ibid., 65-6.

¹⁹ Ibid., 67.

²⁰ Ibid., 152.

After four enjoyable years at Coe, Lee completed her degree requirements. Feeling both sadness and joy at her departure from the college, Lee remembered with fondness her work on the student paper, the Junior Annual Board, and the Student Athletic Committee as well as being president of the freshmen class the second semester, captain of the field hockey varsity team and president of the Woman's Athletic Association, "acquiring excellent leadership experience" that she would later use in her role as a leader in the physical education world.²¹ Lee graduated from Coe College in 1908 with a bachelor of science degree in psychology and a minor in biology, two fields that helped prepare her for a career in physical education.²²

Immediately after her graduation, Lee enrolled in the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics (BNSG), one of the few schools at that time that offered training for would-be female physical educators. At the time, BNSG maintained a leadership role in the field, graduating around 75 percent of the heads of physical education departments for women.²³ A Midwesterner in a predominantly Eastern school, Lee found it difficult to fit in at BNSG. She felt she was picked on by the school's administrator, Amy Homans, and believed the Eastern girls were snubbing her. Slowly, she found some kindred spirits and began to enjoy her time in Boston. Several of the friendships she cultivated at BNSG became important business contacts later in life as her close friends became notable physical educators like herself.

²¹ Ibid., 79.

²² Ibid., 74.

²³ Anita Fussell, "Lee, 93, Still Running Ahead of Pack," Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 23 March 1980.

Unlike her influence as a physical educator, Lee's athletic talents peaked as a sophomore at Coe College. She found that she was lacking in skill compared to her Eastern counterparts in games such as basketball and field hockey. This came as quite a shock to her because she loved both sports and had played them for years before enrolling at BNSG. Her lack of talent in sports did not derail her ambitions; instead, she learned how to be a good loser, another skill that molded her professional life: "For one thing I could always as a teacher sympathize with the poor performers and knowing what I always went through to acquire even mediocre skills in anything, I had great patience with the dubs who, as I early came to see, were my greatest responsibility."²⁴

Deciding on physical education as a career worried her parents. Coming on the end of the Victorian era, Lee's upbringing favored proper education and ambitions. Her parents, once guests at the White House,²⁵ "seemed to think it was not quite nice for young women to be interested in physical education. Well, I wanted to be nice. I was a very proper little girl."²⁶ Defensive about her career choice, Lee attempted to fit the model of a well-bred woman at all times. Away from home at BNSG, Miss Homans emphasized the values Lee received as a child. Homans, a true Victorian woman, forced the young ladies in her care to adopt a professional countenance, exuding strength and respectability in any situation. "She was determined to make not only good teachers of us but also 'ladies' to set high standards for women entering the profession."²⁷ Lee learned to sit up straight, fold her hands in her lap without fidgeting, walk purposefully,

²⁴ Lee, Bloomer Girl, 113.

²⁵ Mabel Lee, Memories Beyond Bloomers (Washington, D.C.: The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, 1978), 165.

²⁶ Pieper.

speak softly, and dress properly. Part of this indoctrination was formulated to counteract the stereotypically “mannish” physical educator—uncouth in manners and overbearing in personality. Lee grudgingly complied while at BNSG, but later adopted Homans’ Victorian principles of femininity wholeheartedly. Homans, however, was no feminist. Lee observed that “She seemed to be more interested in working with men than in competing against them.”²⁸ Developing a somewhat submissive response to men, Lee embraced the principles taught to her at BNSG. She endeavored to achieve her aims in the heavily male-dominated physical education arena through indirect, ladylike means as opposed to a more direct, seemingly masculine approach.

Later in life, Lee remained true to her Victorian upbringing. She found that “submissiveness was the path of wisdom to achieve the ultimate goal”²⁹ in her schooling and in dealing with difficult people. Graduating from Wellesley College in 1910 (BNSG was fully absorbed as the Department of Hygiene at Wellesley College after Lee’s first year), she took a job at her alma mater as the director of women’s physical education at Coe College. As the head of a department, she needed to rely on other department heads and the school president to enact much-needed change in the gymnasium. She rejected the aggressive stance taken by some of her female colleagues, preferring to play the damsel in distress. She found her coyness an effective means of getting what she wanted:

I fared much better by getting some influential man interested in our needs to ‘mount the charger’ for me. Then when he returned with the prize dangling from

²⁷ Lee, Bloomer Girl, 128.

²⁸ Ibid., 135.

²⁹ Ibid., 98.

the end of his lance he was our benefactor forever after, apparently loving the role of helping the ladies, and I would discover later that the people he had tackled in my behalf were also pleased to play the role of aiding the weaker sex if asked in that indirect way.³⁰

Always wary of what she called "militant feminists," she never demonstrated for women's rights or associated herself with the suffragist movement. She believed that advancement could always be enacted harmoniously: "I believe you get what you want if you are patient and do it in a friendly way."³¹

Views Against Men's Intercollegiate Sports

In her first position as a physical educator, Mabel Lee began to see the influence that football played on the rest of her school's athletics. She saw football players as seekers of special privileges, the football team and coaches as corrupt, and the men's athletic department in general as dominating the recreation of the whole school. A battle she would wage for the rest of her career, Lee sought to divorce her physical education department from the evils of the men's department. She recalled that she "quickly learned that while the men's departments were universally called the 'department of physical education and athletics' the women's were merely the 'department of physical education,' and rightly so as we women saw it. This very difference in titles spoke volumes for the differences between the two departments in fundamental philosophy."³²

³⁰ Ibid., 226.

³¹ Tina Heinz, "Nebraskan's Suitcases Hold 93 Years of Memories," Omaha World-Herald, 7 October 1979.

³² Lee, Bloomer Girl, 215.

Further complicating the relationship between the men's and women's departments was the difference in professional preparation between women physical educators and men physical educators. The Boston Normal School of Gymnastics and the few other professional physical education schools for women sent their graduates all over the country to start up replica departments in America's colleges. Therefore most women in the profession had either degrees from specialized schools or were taught by specialized school graduates in other colleges. Most women physical education majors studied psychology, sociology, and anatomy in addition to classical subjects like geometry and French. Men, on the other hand, seemed to need no credentials other than past glory as an athlete or coach to become a physical educator. Lee recalled angrily, "No one in the men's physical education department had studied human anatomy, taken a course in kinesiology or applied anatomy, or studied postural defects and their correction. What they had acquired along these lines had been undoubtedly picked up from athletic trainers . . . even though their wisdom was aimed at one objective only—keeping fellows fit and in condition to be winners of athletic contests."³³

One incident in particular colored Lee's hatred of football and athletic departments: realizing that the women's portion of Coe's gymnasium was never cleaned, she asked her counterpart in the men's physical education department why the janitor never cleaned her side. He told her that the janitor was one of Coe's football stars and that the young man was too tired from school work and football practice to get around to cleaning the whole gymnasium. When she protested that if he could not do the work, he

³³ Ibid., 214.

should not have the job, the man incredulously told her that the football star was working hard on the football field and in the classroom and that they should not ask more of him. She concluded that "He was being paid for playing football and they wouldn't come out in the open and admit it. . . . This janitor's job was a trumped-up scheme to cover the dishonesty." Disillusioned, "That day there was born in my heart the utter disrespect I have held all my life ever since for men's intercollegiate athletics and all the lying, dishonesty and subterfuge they stand for—for the sake of having winning teams."³⁴

Organizing Her First Department

As a new faculty member at Coe College, Lee threw herself into her work by organizing a dance and theatrical pageant for her girls. Believing strongly in educational democracy, she took everyone who wished to enter the pageant, no matter how poor her skills. "This has always been almost a religious tenet with me in all my teaching years that no one was ever to be denied a chance to try what she wanted to try no matter how poor her skill, no matter how much she got into everyone's way. This belief to me was the keystone of democracy in education."³⁵

Excited about her new expertise, Lee did not understand how anyone could be disinterested in sports. Her democratic sports philosophy dictated that not only would every girl be able to participate in sporting opportunities, but that every girl should participate. She chose a selection from Cornelia Otis Skinner and Emily Kimbrough's

³⁴ Ibid., 283.

³⁵ Ibid., 250.

book, Our Hearts Were Young and Gay, to reflect on the absurdity of girls' unwillingness to play sports:

At Bryn Mawr I [Cornelia Skinner] played hockey only because it was compulsory. My team was the seventh, which seldom met owing to the fact that there were no other teams inadequate enough to meet us. I tried basket ball (also compulsory) but if anyone had the lack of judgment to toss a ball at me I ducked it and ran. The only outstanding feat I ever accomplished in that repulsively degrading activity known familiarly as "gym" was to knock myself senseless with an Indian club.

In response to this passage, Lee wrote, "I'm sure Cornelia's heart, young and gay as it was, would have been still younger and gayer if only she had loved field hockey as had I."³⁶

Basketball, the sport she introduced to Centerville, remained close to Lee's heart. As one of the first competitive sports for women, basketball games for women quickly degenerated from Lee's idealized version emphasizing friendly recreation to a cutthroat contest with only victory as a goal. While at Coe, Lee sometimes refereed girls' high school basketball games, played not among a school's girls but between neighboring high schools. She "disapproved highly of their style of rough play and emphasis on winning at all costs."³⁷ Lee had other reasons to worry about the girls. Not much was known about the effects of athletics on women's health at the time, and many suspected that young women would permanently harm themselves by playing vigorously. A 1929 article by a

³⁶ Ibid., 256.

woman physician reflected on medical opinion of the previous twenty years, enumerating alleged medical ills associated with interscholastic or intercollegiate athletics for women. Referring to every one of these problems at various times in her books, Lee felt genuine concern for the health of girls and women in sports:

Some of the features of highly competitive sports were particularly detrimental to girls. Excessively long periods, as in basketball, brought on strain and exhaustion. Rough bodily contact sometimes resulted in serious physical injury. Too intense emotional excitement in interscholastic competitions produced nervous instability and, occasionally, even hysteria. The exploitation of "stars" and victories, and the intensive schedules of competitive games, often coupled with poor traveling conditions, lack of sleep, and improper food, led to exhaustion and illness. There were no adequate physical examinations—often none at all; consequently, girls with defective hearts or other abnormalities were allowed to do themselves permanent injury. Moreover, most girls' athletics were coached by men, which meant not only excessively intense programs of training, but complete disregard of the functional differences of women.³⁸

At the high school basketball games, Lee attempted to single-handedly put a stop to games she could not condone. "Between halves I tried to talk to the principals and other teachers and parents watching the game to get them to see how much more benefit the girls and the community would get out of basketball if they would play the game the way

³⁷ Ibid., 268.

³⁸ Linda Gage Roth, M.D., "Are Sports Harmful to Women?" The Forum 81 (May 1929), 314.

the girls at Coe played it, but I always felt I was for the most part wasting my time.”³⁹ She was thwarted in her efforts to influence the coaches and players because they were always off being coached or resting. Her disapproval mounted as she suspected that the halftime coaching for the losing girls consisted of having “the fear of the devil himself” put in them by their male coaches.⁴⁰

In summary, Lee did not believe in highly competitive games for women, and did not understand that anyone would want to play a game so far from her idea of enjoyable recreation. She never accepted that women might want to play highly competitive games; instead, she viewed sports played for spectators or managed by men as pure exploitation of women.

Non-Competitive Philosophy

Lee’s total conviction about the “life-restoring, life-refreshing, life-enriching values”⁴¹ of physical education and her fears that vigorous, male-dominated varsity sports might lead to commercialism, exploitation, and emasculation led her to develop, beginning in 1908 with her enrollment at BNSG, a non-competitive sport philosophy.⁴² Girls who did not like sports or who had no special talent for athletics would be mixed among teams containing girls with high amounts of talent. Because the game was not played for a crowd or for a championship, there would be no pressure to win and girls could enjoy themselves. The teams would be mixed up often so that girls would not be

³⁹ Lee, Bloomer Girl, 268.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 268.

⁴¹ Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 227.

stuck on a losing team, but even losing teams would have fun and enjoy the recreative benefits of athletic activity. In 1914, an English writer that Lee quoted pointed out differences in athletic philosophies: "In England, the aim [of athletics] is recreation; in America, it is victory and especially victory over the institution which is a special rival; if we fail to accomplish that, the season is counted a failure. And so everything is organized with a view to bringing about victory."⁴³ Lee agreed with this writer wholeheartedly, placing her philosophy in line with the English one, relegating the so-called American philosophy to the men's sector exclusively.

Reflecting on her negative views of the high school girls' basketball games she refereed, she came to the conclusion that she would never advocate a program of intercollegiate athletics for women. "I would teach my students to enjoy match games among themselves on their own home-grounds. I would see to it that they had much fun and wholesome exercise all devoid of the many wrong things that the excitement and stress of intercollegiate sports would be sure to induce into their playing."⁴⁴ She had no interest in finding out if her school could muster a better team than a neighboring school, concerned only that her "pupils got opportunities to play a variety of games, that all who wanted to should play, not just the skilled ones, and that regardless of who won any match, all have good companionship, fun, healthful exercise and a fine educational experience."⁴⁵

⁴² Susan K. Cahn, Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth Century Women's Sport (New York, The Free Press, 1994), 65.

⁴³ Lee, Bloomer Girl, 264.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 271.

A personal experience led Lee to believe that she had found a sports philosophy that would provide the most benefit for the most number of people. Receiving an invitation and program for a professional conference at Wellesley College in 1922, she read that the meeting at her alma mater would feature field hockey games for the attendees. Excited about playing the game she had given up twelve years before in favor of a referee's whistle, Lee immediately signed up. Arriving on the field with other attendees, enough women to make up more than two teams, she missed the first ball shot to her and was promptly cut from the field hockey exhibition entirely. "I hung about the field with stick in hand, feeling that surely, since I had come out and was showing an eagerness to play I would be given a chance to go back on the field for part of the time. Surely there would be turns for all who wished to play."⁴⁶ Inquiring further, the woman in charge told her that only the more skilled girls were to play for the hockey periods of the conference. Extremely disappointed, Lee left the field, resolving "that in my teaching I would follow the American concept of democracy and would be mindful of all and see that the unskilled had opportunity along with the skilled to enjoy sports."⁴⁷ Feeling rejected, she vowed to never make girls feel the same disappointment she felt when not able to make a team. Women would have no varsity teams, no championships, no international competition, and minimal local travel.⁴⁸ Her philosophy soon came to be the predominant one in the country as Mabel Lee and like-minded women physical educators gained in experience, influence, and number.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 361.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 361-2.

⁴⁸ Lucas and Smith, 352-3.

New Departments

After eight years of teaching at Coe College without one raise or improvement in her position, Lee decided to try her luck at another institution. She was also fed up with a man she called "Mr. X" who blocked her decisions at Coe at every opportunity. Apparently "Mr. X" had wanted another woman to be Coe's physical educator and resented Lee's appointment. A prominent businessman, "Mr. X" whipped up opposition to every idea she presented including dancing, pageants, recitals, and music. Escaping Coe's restrictive atmosphere, she found higher pay and the rank of full professor at Oregon Agricultural College (OAC—later renamed Oregon State University) in 1918. Unfortunately, she did not find happiness. Her predecessor had been irascible and had left the rest of the faculty with a very negative view of women's physical education. Lee found her reception at her new school cool at best and outwardly hostile at worst. She never got over the way the faculty and students seemed to gang up on her. "I felt a social outcast—I who . . . had been quite 'the belle of the ball' with the students and most of the faculty in a small college setting."⁴⁹

After a short trip off-campus in the spring of 1919, she returned to find that some of her girls had organized themselves into a varsity basketball team and had issued challenges to other teams while Lee was away. Lee's fiery-tempered predecessor as head of the women's gymnasium had promised to let the girls play as an intercollegiate team the following semester, leaving the promise for Lee to fulfill. Succeeding in revoking the

⁴⁹ Lee, Bloomer Girl, 321.

same promise to the girls' field hockey team immediately after her arrival, Lee now had another angry and frustrated girls' team to disband. "When I learned who the leaders were and rounded them up in my office to talk the matter over, I found I had a real mutiny on my hands."⁵⁰ She was able to turn the field hockey players around to embrace her version of sports and athletics, but the basketball girls would not accept her vision. Apparently the girls' reaction to Lee's carefully cultivated philosophy was not an unusual one. Many girls in colleges throughout America failed to understand women physical educators' insistence on intramural sports over intercollegiate pursuits. Girls, disorganized or dependant on the women physical educators for a degree and a job, reluctantly complied.⁵¹ Disillusioned over the girls' rejection of her philosophy, Lee elected to leave OAC after the end of the school year rather than deal with the hostility any longer.

The summer after she left OAC, Lee caught influenza and remained extremely ill for a year and a half. Despite her sickly childhood and chronically underweight frame, she was one of the few people to walk out of the makeshift infirmary in which she was "left to die."⁵² Recovering slowly, she accepted a job at Beloit College in the fall of 1920. Beloit offered her a perfect atmosphere to advance her position on women's sports—her predecessor "had promoted intercollegiate athletics for women to the dismay of most of the faculty, to the downright disapproval of the president and the dean of women, to the neglect of most of the students and to the delight of the few girls who were

⁵⁰ Ibid., 323.

⁵¹ Cahn, 70-71.

⁵² Pieper.

chosen for her varsity teams.”⁵³ Rejecting women’s intercollegiate athletics from the start, Lee found a sympathetic, friendly, welcoming staff willing to let her have free reign of her department.

Despite the support of the administration, Beloit was not free of problems for Lee. Women had been admitted to Beloit’s campus only twenty-five years earlier, much to the dismay of a group of male students. A particular fraternity kept the anti-women tradition alive through alumni support. After women won the right to wear knickers on their hiking club outings encouraged by Lee, the student newspaper reported: “Women now have the vote but for Heaven’s sake let’s not let them begin wearing pants, too.”⁵⁴ When Lee asked for more time in the shared men’s and women’s gymnasium in 1921, the tradition-bound paper again singled her out: “Since Miss Lee has come to the Beloit faculty she has introduced many innovations—most of them wild! The next thing we know she will be bobbing her hair.”⁵⁵

In 1922, Lee attended a meeting of the Middle West Society of Directors of Physical Education for College Women at Iowa State College (later Iowa State University). Boston Normal School of Gymnastics graduate and group president Blanche Trilling asked Lee to prepare the “con” side of a debate regarding women’s intercollegiate athletics. Lee accepted, “strongly convinced that physical education for women had too much groundwork to do getting physical education established in the colleges to spend time on programs of intercollegiate athletics which would engage only

⁵³ Lee, Bloomer Girl, 329.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 348-9.

the highly skilled.”⁵⁶ To prepare for her debate, she “began correspondence on the subject throughout the country on a sort of hit-and-miss basis as time was too short to canvas a large group of colleges. Replies to my queries showed an interest in the subject and some diversity of opinions, although the great majority of those who responded were against intercollegiate athletics.”⁵⁷ When she showed up for the debate, she found that the woman presenting the “pro” side had not come to the meeting. Ms. Trilling asked Lee to present both sides of the debate for the group.

During the course of the “debate,” it became clear to Lee that everyone but the meeting’s hostess supported her “con” opinion on women’s intercollegiate athletics. Later, she received minutes from the meeting stating that “The discussion was very interesting in that it revealed the fact that several present are beginning to look with favor on some form of intercollegiate competition.”⁵⁸ Astonished, she deduced that the group’s secretary, not present at the meeting, had asked the hostess for a summary of the debate. Unwilling to start an argument at the next meeting, Lee allowed the minutes to be approved with the debate’s faulty results recorded.⁵⁹ She later regretted her decision to remain silent, worrying that historians looking at the group’s minutes would mistakenly interpret them as early widespread support for women’s intercollegiate athletics.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid., 358.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 358.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 359.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 360.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Organizations Against Intercollegiate Athletics

Enjoying physical education's many professional organizations for the leadership and professional solidarity provided to the country's many physical educators, Lee joined many of the fledgling groups. The formation of the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation in 1922 signaled the beginning of a system of interlocking directorates in which the same group of women physical educators came to control a number of different organizations working for the same goals in women's sport.⁶¹ Because of the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics' predominance as the foremost trainer of women physical educators, these "interlocking directorates" were led almost exclusively by a small group of BNSG graduates who received professional training in a single philosophy. Confident in the righteousness of their philosophy and their sole legitimacy as the leaders of college women's athletics (or lack thereof), the former BNSG girls-turned-prominent-physical-educators succeeded in monopolizing mainstream thought about physical education and sports for women from around 1910 to well after World War II.

Mabel Lee certainly relied on her BNSG alumnae for moral support. Wondering if her lack of physical ability might disqualify her as a capable physical education administrator, she reflected that BNSG graduates Blanche Trilling, Mary Coleman, and J. Anna Norris were very capable, but "all essentially administrators, not performers in or demonstrators of physical activities."⁶² One of the privileged few as a BNSG grad and a college women's physical educator, Lee reported the incomprehensible rumblings of non-

⁶¹ Lucas and Smith, 351.

collegiate physical educators or local recreation specialists who were not represented as leaders in the professional organizations: "As early as 1930 a few whisperings were heard from the 'not ins' that [the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation] was controlled by a little clique and that too many of them were college teachers." Two years later, another of Mabel Lee's groups, the National Section on Women's Athletics "was now also criticized by the 'not ins' as being too much in the control of college teachers." She explained this stronghold by reasoning that college physical educators, rather than city or state recreation leaders, were the only ones with enough time to attend the professional meetings.⁶³

Lee, became devoted to her professional organizations, working long and hard within the groups to ensure their devotion to the her philosophy, the BNSG philosophy. In 1924, it was her "careful work on the question of Varsity Competition for Women that made the Athletic Conference of American College Women in session at Berkeley last year, go on record as opposed to all varsity competition for women."⁶⁴ The University of Nebraska's Daily Nebraskan reported that in April 1945, Lee attended three conventions in a row, holding prominent positions in each. She was elected president of the Directors of Physical Education for Women in Universities and Colleges of the Middle West at the first convention. The directors of a committee at this meeting "discussed the relative value of track and field for women. The consensus of opinion was that they were non-essential." Leaving the first convention, she traveled to the Women's Division of the

⁶² Lee, Bloomer Girl, 303.

⁶³ Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 285-6.

⁶⁴ "Directors of Women's Sports," The Cornhusker (University of Nebraska yearbook, 1925), 523.

National Amateur Athletic Federation, where she presented a paper on "The Evaluation of Athletic Activities for College Women." A committee was appointed to investigate amateur and professional women's athletics, resulting in a pronouncement that the division was against competition for women. The third convention, a meeting of the Midwest Association of Physical Education, again featured a paper by Lee entitled "Intercollegiate Athletics for Women."⁶⁵ This group decided to let Lee organize an "elaborate intramural recreational program for women."⁶⁶ Mabel Lee, along with her BNSG cronies Blanche Trilling, Dr. J. Anna Norris, Ethel Perrin, Mary C. Coleman and non-BNSG grad but devoted disciple Agnes Wayman succeeded in wresting control of women's physical education from their male counterparts. Once armed with their own organizations, however, this small group of powerful women clung to their intractable position despite the opposition posed by recreation leaders, other physical educators like Ina Gittings (see Chapter 3), and college women of the next generation. Lee triumphantly recorded the influence of BNSG during the '20s, '30s, and '40s: "For the first half of the twentieth century, most of the women in the country who were recognized top leaders in the field were graduates of this school"⁶⁷ with Mabel Lee leading the way.

Play Days

As a substitute for intercollegiate athletics and spectator sports for women, Lee came up with the idea of a "play day." Play days consisted of girls from a few schools

⁶⁵ "Lee Elected Head of Directors," Daily Nebraskan 24, no. 123 (16 April 1945), 1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Lee, Bloomer Girl, 195.

meeting for athletics such as volleyball, swimming, and basketball as well as bowling, folk dancing, and hopscotch. Unlike intercollegiate athletics, each team would feature girls from all of the schools represented to minimize inter-school rivalries. All teams would rotate between the activities, stopping often for refreshment breaks, songs, and cheers to increase their social interaction.⁶⁸ Although some schools still offered varsity sports during the play day's heyday in the 1920s and 1930s, the play day presented an attractive non-competitive alternative to administrators worried about women's health or unwilling to concede athletic programs to female students.⁶⁹ The Department of Recreation of Oakland, California even invented a motto: "Play for every girl and woman—but no championships."⁷⁰

Mabel Lee set out to prove that her play day concept was not only successful, but also widely embraced as the right path of women's sports. In 1923, she collected statistics from fifty colleges indicating that only 22 percent allowed intercollegiate competition and that 93 percent of the physical educators were opposed to varsity competition. Two years later, she wrote that her survey had "led several colleges to give up their intercollegiate contests in favor of Play Days."⁷¹ In 1931, Lee followed up her initial survey, attempting to prove once and for all how "absolutely determined are the women of the physical education profession and . . . the women college students of today, not to permit women's athletics to follow in the steps of men's athletics." The

⁶⁸ Lucas and Smith, 360.

⁶⁹ Joan S. Hult, Play Day expert, personal interview via e-mail, 16 April 1999.

⁷⁰ Lucas and Smith, 360.

⁷¹ Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 75.

second survey indicated that of the 100 colleges canvassed, only 12 percent permitted intercollegiate athletics, but 80 percent had play days.⁷²

Not all were pleased with the alleged benefits of the non-competitive play day. In 1926, one critic wrote, "The movement now on foot to restrict and abolish, or denature sport for girls, is part of the enslavement from which women have suffered through the ages. It can not finally succeed, altho it may gain sufficient present vogue . . . to cheat a generation of girls of the contact with the world which is their right."⁷³ Another woman wrote: "We had fun at these play days, and we enjoyed the tea and the sociability—but the better players among us felt frustrated by the lack of meaningful team play. . . . These play days did little to satisfy our desire for all-out competition with worthy and honored opponents."⁷⁴ Attempting to satisfy women's competitive urges, women physical educators' advocated the play day as a chance for girls to engage in sports without the cutthroat competition, manly roughness, or possible adverse health effects of more vigorous activity.

Conduct of Physical Education

Responding to repeated requests for professional advice, Lee wrote a physical education textbook in 1937 containing valuable reading material for future physical educators and advice on how to set up departments modeled on Mabel Lee's ideal. Lee's book contained information gathered while at the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics

⁷² Lucas and Smith, 360.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 363.

as well as in her teaching career. As one of the first textbooks on physical education, Lee's book provided her sporting philosophy in an area with few competing works. Advocating her non-competitive sports theory for women, Lee attempted to justify her stance by using scientific evidence to prove the harm that might come to young women who strayed from her accepted path. Lee, not a doctor or scientist herself, relied heavily on hearsay and the quasi-scientific studies of the time to back her ideas. The Conduct of Physical Education served as a much-needed guide to physical education instructors, but hardly put to rest the ongoing debate over women's athletics.

Lee's primary goal in physical education was to keep women from imitating men in sports and in competition. In men's sports, she saw myriad evils, but under the proper supervision, she believed that women's sports could be recreative and uplifting yet free from corruption and individualism. The ideal supervisor of girls and women would be a woman, like herself, formally trained and free from male influence. These women physical educators would be the only people capable of showing women the correct path of athletic pursuits while steering them away from health damage resulting from male-patterned sports. In order to remove women's and girls' physical education programs from under male supervision, she insisted in her textbook that girls be treated as separate entities, not smaller, weaker versions of boys. To her, ignoring this fact would lead to permanent damage. She claimed that "A former president of one of the leading physical education schools, who studies the reaction of women to athletics over a period of many years, found that there were unfavorable effects on the thyroid gland in the cases where

women participated in the athletic exercises of men.”⁷⁵ Aside from causing irregular thyroid activity, trying to get girls to keep up with boys in physical activities was, according to Lee, unrealistic and unhealthy:

The girl’s relative strength compared to her weight is much lower than that of the boy, the ratio being 54 to 87. And too, her shorter leg length in relation to her trunk length prevents her from running and jumping as easily as the boy, while her narrow shoulder width in relation to hip width gives her a more limited endurance. Because of fewer red blood cells, the girl does not absorb into her blood stream as much oxygen as does the boy, thus making it impossible for her to remove the by-products of fatigue as rapidly.⁷⁶

To fully understand the unique problems of female physical education, each school needed to separate its girls, looking to formally-trained female physical educators for direction.

Emphasizing the differences in the sexes, Lee noted that boys and girls enjoyed different types of play; differences that indicated fundamentally different natures. Boys’ and girls’ physical exercises must be geared for the type of activity that each naturally preferred, and not forcing both sexes into just boys’ favored activities. “For example, boys by nature enjoy in indulging in physical combat, but girls at no age level prefer this type of sport.”⁷⁷ Lee used her book as a public pronouncement of her stance on women’s athletics and again condemned male athletics’ negative by-products, stressing that

⁷⁵ “Benefits of Directed Physical Education Outlined by Lee.” Unknown review of Lee’s book Conduct of Physical Education, 7 February 1938?, Lincoln Journal Star files.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

"[girls'] competition must be free of emotionalism, intense competition, free of all severe physical strain and from all attempts to imitate the boys. . . . It amounts to keeping girls out of 'spectator' athletics, and providing them with a sports realm of their own."

Schools following Lee's advice presented in The Conduct of Physical Education would effectively carve out turf for woman physical educators into which men or non-formally trained physical educators could not enter for fear of women students' health.

In the first several decades of the century, control of women's athletics passed from men in the athletic department to male physical educators to female physical educators. Hoping to create physically, emotionally, morally, and socially safe sports for young women, physical educators like Mabel Lee, often graduates of the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics, took control of women-directed physical education organizations. These organizations, led by the BNSG-controlled Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation, directed women into intramural activities emphasizing camaraderie and recreation rather than competition and victory. Mabel Lee, as a leader among women physical educators, placed all of her professional ambitions on this philosophy, continuing to devote the rest of her long life to the promotion of intramural sports and the condemnation of intercollegiate sports. Lee and her physical education friends swayed a large number of colleges to accept their vision of women's sports for a time, but eventually restless women athletes broke free.

CHAPTER 2: LOUISE POUND

AND HER COMPETITIVE DRIVE

Louise Pound was one of the most remarkable women in Nebraska during the first half of the century. Her incredible athletic skills earned her fame throughout the country as a basketball player and coach, tennis champion, golfer, cyclist, and skater. Exceptionally gifted physically, Pound took advantage of temporarily relaxed restrictions on women athletes at the turn of the century, continuing to play tennis and golf with abandon after more vigorous games like basketball and baseball had returned to the realm of the forbidden. Adopting a philosophy diametrically opposed to that of Mabel Lee's, Pound sought to compete at the highest levels against all comers, women or men, often defeating her male competitors. Ignoring advice perpetuated by physical educators that serious physical activity would result in physical, emotional, moral, and social damage, Pound took advantage of her privileged position as a member of one of Lincoln's most prominent families to play sports without fear of retribution. As a "new woman" of the emerging modern middle class, Pound threw off old values in search of excitement.

Susan Cahn, in her book Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport (1994), describes women like Pound as the twentieth-century's "new type of athletic girl," remarking that "the female athlete represented the bold and

energetic modern woman, breaking free from Victorian constraints, and tossing aside old-fashioned ideas about separate spheres for men and women.”¹

In Pound’s long career as a noted English scholar and professor, she was viewed as a friend and ally by many students and fellow instructors, but her gruff demeanor and personal feelings regarding the administration of the University of Nebraska won her no friends among chancellors and deans. Unlike Mabel Lee, Pound never wrote an autobiography explicitly stating her feelings for sports for all women, explaining, “H.L. Mencken used to urge me to write my autobiography, said he would get it printed. I never kept a diary and my memory of events and their chronology is very confused and unreliable, or wanting. But, especially, I’m too indolent to bother with it.”² Most of her life’s details must be gleaned from correspondence and eulogies. Earning wide fame as an author and a scholar, Pound seems to have devoted her life and writings to academics, giving up her athletic career early in the 1930s without having written much about it. Therefore Louise Pound’s athletic career and views on women’s athletics must be inferred from her résumé-like list of athletic honors and her personality as a teacher.

Youth

Louise Pound, born on 30 June 1872, came from an family of pioneering Quakers who moved from New York state to Lincoln, Nebraska in 1869.³ One of the city’s most

¹ Susan K. Cahn, Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women’s Sport (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 7.

² B. A. Botkin, “Pound Sterling: Letters from a ‘Lady Professor,’” Prairie Schooner 33 no. 1 (1959) 31.

³ Evelyn H. Haller, “Pound, Louise, June 30, 1872—June 28, 1958,” Notable American Women: The Modern Period, A Biographical Dictionary, ed. Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Green (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), 557.

well-known and powerful families, the Pounds enjoyed the surprisingly broad cultural opportunities available to Lincoln's new middle class. Bernice Slote commented: "It may have been mud-flats on the outside, but it was Boston within."⁴ Her father, Stephen Bosworth Pound, was a lawyer, district court judge, and state senator.⁵ Her mother, Laura J. (Biddlecombe) Pound, attended Lombard College in Galesburg, Illinois, and had been a teacher. Mrs. Pound, thinking that the Lincoln public schools were not challenging enough and "too stereotyped," taught her three children herself.⁶ No ordinary education, the Pound children, Roscoe, Louise, and Olivia, studied classical literature, German, and botany at a very early age.⁷ Learning permeated the household, a place where on Sunday afternoons the Pounds read Greek scriptures aloud to visitors.⁸

The Pound children, all exceptionally bright, developed a competitive nature. Roscoe and Louise, the two oldest, especially enjoyed friendly rivalries with each other. "Toys were scarce and humdrum, so the Pound children often made their own. . . . The children also had two armies of wooden soldiers whittled out by Louise, dressed by Olivia, and given the proper military designations by Roscoe. They were maneuvered by Roscoe and Louise. Sometimes the battles became so fierce that Mrs. Pound had to interfere and imprison both armies until a truce was declared."⁹ When Louise Pound was fourteen, she entered the University of Nebraska's two-year preparatory Latin school,

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Robert N. Manley, Centennial History of the University of Nebraska: I. Frontier University (1869-1919), (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 238.

⁹ Olivia Pound?, "Family Portrait," University of Nebraska Archives.

beginning her formal education.¹⁰ Louise soon exhibited a natural talent for athletics. Her father had played baseball in college, but the rest of the family seemed to defer to Louise in the area of athletic skill. According to Roscoe, "Louise inherited a skill at games which I have always lacked . . . she could excel in all active outdoor games and sports. No less could she excel in indoor games of every sort, seeming from the beginning to have a genius for them."¹¹ Louise entered the University's undergraduate program in 1888 already well-known as a poet, class orator, and an athlete, joining her brother Roscoe who, too, had already make a name for himself as an extraordinarily bright scholar.

The Pound children had no time for the old Victorian notions of restraint and moderation in their social lives. As they expanded their circle of friends at the university, "there was always something going on in their lively group."¹² The family home, a gathering place for youth, stretched to accommodate all of their friends. The Pounds often held dances and even housed less fortunate farm girls who wished to attend the university.¹³ One of the girls who enjoyed the Pounds' generosity wrote of Mrs. Pound, "Like her daughters, she never complained, always saw the best in people; befriended many; exercised a wonderful sense of humor, and constantly improved her mind. Louise, I found, was always worth a chuckle. Wee secrets were shared as a bit of 'deviltry.'"¹⁴ But not everyone found Louise Pound charming: "Many of her college contemporaries

¹⁰ Effie Leese Scott, "An Appreciation: Louise Pound," Unknown publication, possibly part of a program for Louise Pound's Kiwanis Medal award ceremony, Lincoln Journal Star clippings file, 5-10.

¹¹ Roscoe Pound, "My Sister Louise," Omaha World-Herald, 21 July 1957.

¹² Olivia Pound?, "Family Portrait."

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Mamie J. Meredith, "The Pound Family of Lincoln, Nebraska," 24 May 1964, University of Nebraska

thought her ‘cold-hearted,’ perhaps because they were not well acquainted with her, or perhaps because of her competitive spirit.”¹⁵ To closer friends, however, she, like her brother Roscoe, “was exceedingly jolly, loving jokes, pranks, and parties; and like him, she had enormous reserves of energy.”¹⁶

During Pound’s undergraduate years, she and friend Willa Cather joined the school paper, The Hesperian. Fueled by an intense interest in writing and literature, the women’s lively editorials and witty articles thrilled fellow students. Two women just emerging from the staid Victorian era, Pound and Cather made quite an impact at their prairie university since many men still felt threatened by the presence of women students on campus. Fellow student Alvin Johnson (who later became a prominent social scientist) vindicated the pair’s contributions to student life at a debate about sexual equality. Johnson took offense at the hackneyed male argument that although women could be better students than men, their brains were not original, only acquisitive and regurgitative. He commented: “Having been brought up with the convictions of sex equality, I repudiated this dogma, and in argument with the champions of male monopoly of originality I would dwell on the fact that the two most original persons among our university students were Willa Cather and Louise Pound.”¹⁷

While a student at the University, Louise Pound grew into a “new woman,” completely rejecting the idea that women should remain in the “separate sphere” of the home. She engaged in almost every sort of physical activity available for women, and

Archives.

¹⁵ Robert E. Knoll, Prairie University: A History of the University of Nebraska (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 33.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

some that were not. In the spring of 1889, Pound organized a girl's military company and equipped its members with 1880 Springfield rifles.¹⁸ She deflected administrators' concern for her Company D girls by reasoning that "since there was as yet no gymnasium, the drill team was justified on the grounds that the girls needed exercise—and they certainly did get it, since they used the same heavy rifles that were issued to the men."¹⁹ Exhibiting her natural athletic talent, she made a record at target practice.²⁰

Pound graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1892 with a bachelor's degree in literature, a music diploma for piano, and a Phi Beta Kappa key which read *sedeant pueri*, which her brother Roscoe translated as: "Let the boys go back and sit down."²¹ She immediately enrolled in the University's master's degree program and was hired as an assistant in the English department in 1893. Completing the requirements for her master's degree in 1895, Pound had already advanced herself in the English department to assistant instructor.²² Not willing to give up her love of athletics for her professional career just yet, Pound exemplified the ideals of the turn-of-the-century's "new woman"²³ by throwing herself into the new sport of intercollegiate basketball, a controversial activity for a young woman at the time.

Basketball

¹⁷ Manley, 241. (Possibly quoted from The Hesperian around 1898.)

¹⁸ Nellie Snyder Yost, "Nebraska's Scholarly Athlete: Louise Pound, 1872-1958," Nebraska History 64 (1983), 484.

¹⁹ Manley, 268.

²⁰ Roscoe Pound.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Louise Pound, Selected Writings of Louise Pound (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971), 365.

²³ "Louise Pound Embodied 1890 'New Woman' Idea," The Journalist, 17 November 1976.

For about ten years starting in 1897, Pound served as a player, co-captain, and manager of the intercollegiate women's basketball team. Having nothing but contempt for the mild and non-competitive women's basketball rules favored by physical educators, Pound's team played by men's rules. As Pound remembered, "The less skillful played by the conventional [women's] court rules."²⁴ A press release from one of the 1898 girls' games captured the excitement and controversy surrounding the new sport and the decidedly un-Victorian way in which the Nebraska girls played it:

Probably the most unique and exciting bit of athletics that this summer has yielded at the University of Chicago was the basket-ball match yesterday between picked co-eds and an all-university team of captains from basket-ball teams belonging to other western colleges. From the moment of the broaching of the idea interest was aroused, perhaps more especially because the game being the roughest known to women, it must necessarily be played in strict gymnasium dress, and with proper abandon. Therefore no men would be permitted to see it, and only a specially invited set of women spectators was allowed. . . .

"Isn't it horribly interesting?" shivered a spectator.

"Horribly! Yes, that's exactly the word!"

"I call it worse than football."

"Certainly it's quite as bad, especially when played on this hard floor. I can imagine it might be endurable if played on the soft grass."

²⁴ "Louise Pound, The Athlete," unknown source, Lincoln Journal Star clippings file dated 13 November 1975. Copied in part from a 1956 Louise Pound letter in the Nebraska State Historical Society archives, Louise Pound collection.

"There ought to be a physician here, just as at football games."

"Well, I wouldn't play it unless my life were insured. I shouldn't be thinking of the 'wife and children at home.' Wouldn't you, girls?"

"My, but do you smell the arnica [an herbal tincture used to treat sprains and bruises]?"

"I should think so," said a grave young woman who had the air of a seminary. "I came here to get some ideas about the game for our girls to play at home. But I've decided I won't let them. They may stick to tennis. Basket-ball is too much!"

"Oh, nothing much happens, as a rule," said Captain [Louise] Pound, easily. "Sometimes there's a dislocated wrist or collar-bone, a black eye, a cut on the lip, a broken finger or some little thing like that, but I never saw anything serious happen. Oh, yes, I know one girl was killed in Minnesota last year-- fractured her heart, I believe, but, then, she ought never to have been playing. Defective hearts will not do in basket-ball."

Evidently not, for a more superbly set-up lot of young women than these players could hardly be imagined. Straight and strong and supple, quick of ear and eye and limb, firm of flesh and rosy, healthful and muscular and magnificently trained, they were a set of experts, and the strong, almost masculine, game showed it.²⁵

²⁵ Polly (only name given), "In Basket Ball, Athletic Young Women Indulge in a Rough Game, No Weaklings are Allowed," Chicago Sunday Times-Herald, 14 August 1898, University of Nebraska Archives.

The rough game could not help but arouse horror in some of the spectators. Women, long confined to the "separate sphere" of the Victorian home, could barely even walk a block without fainting, and now girls were running around in bloomer costumes, running and grabbing and knocking each other around in a heated game of basketball. The players loved the excitement, but administrators began to fear harmful health consequences.

Gaining fame as the amateur coach of winning basketball teams at the University of Nebraska in intercollegiate matches,²⁶ Louise Pound and the head of the women's gymnasium, Mrs. Anne Barr Clapp (who was married to the head of the men's gymnasium, Dr. R.G. Clapp), published their own version of basketball rules for women in 1904. Invented only thirteen years earlier, basketball had about as many different rule variations in 1904 as there were schools playing the game.²⁷ Pound had played by men's rules earlier in her career, but social constraints were forcing her to come up with rules that dictated a less vigorous game for the young ladies. Her rules fell somewhere between the sometimes violent men's rules and the mildest form of the "ladies' game," in which one main basketball court was divided into three courts and up to nine zones in which certain players remained during the play.²⁸ There was no running back and forth like in today's game, but instead the women would take a couple of steps and perhaps a single dribble and then throw the ball to another player. This ladies' game forbade any contact with other players.

Pound and Mrs. Clapp's rules, called the "Rules for Basket Ball for Women as

²⁶ Anne Longman, "Louise Pound '47 Recipient Of Annual Kiwanis Club Medal," Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 9 November 1947.

²⁷ Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 99, s.v. "basketball."

²⁸ Cahn, 86.

played in the University of Nebraska," dictated teams of no fewer than five, not more than nine players (other ladies' games permitted up to fifteen players per side).²⁹ The game had twenty minute halves with a ten minute halftime, but this rule could be changed with mutual consent of the teams. Using closed-bottomed nets, after each basket the referee brought the ball to center court for a jump ball. The ball could not be batted, snatched, or struck from the hands of an opponent, and the girls could not hold the ball for more than three seconds unless trying to score. Unlike the milder ladies' game, dribbling was allowed, and girls had to throw the ball to pass it; they could not simply hand the ball off to another player. The rules forbade holding, tackling, and pushing,³⁰ but Pound undoubtedly relaxed these rules in games under her purview.

Commenting on the new Nebraska rules, Mrs. Clapp explained that intercollegiate sports encouraged many positive qualities in young women: "when properly directed, these sports should be not only highly beneficial from a physical standpoint, but they should develop certain qualities of character in the girl which no routine physical exercise will do. Self-control, courage, unselfishness, subordination, these are only a few of the qualities developed by girls' athletics, and which go towards fostering strong character."³¹ Pound also defended their game: "It is a more open and spirited game than the conventional women's game, and fosters better concerted work, especially in

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Rules for Basket Ball for Women as played in the University of Nebraska," edited by Mrs. R. G. Clapp (director of the Women's Gymnasium) and Miss Louise Pound (manager of the women's team), Lincoln, 1904, Nebraska State Historical Society archives, Louise Pound collection.

³¹ Anne Barr Clapp and Louise Pound, "Girls' Basket Ball in the University of Nebraska, Decennial Souvenir, 1896-1906," June 1906, Nebraska State Historical Society archives, Louise Pound collection.

aggression.”³²

Women at the University of Nebraska enjoyed a temporary explosion in sports from about 1900 to 1908 as modern values gained an advantage over Victorian values. In each of these years women students at the University started new teams; Pound helping with girls' tennis tournaments, girls' track meets, and her undefeated basketball team. The University of Nebraska women's basketball team, the women's athletic program's crown jewel, met teams from the University of Missouri, the University of Minnesota, Baker University, the Haskell Indian girls, the Omaha YWCA, and the Peru Normal team.³³ According to the Daily Nebraskan, “The games attracted many enthusiastic spectators, and were chaperoned by the chancellor's wife, Mrs. W.J. Bryan, the governor's wife, and many other prominent Lincoln ladies. Men's rules were followed when the stronger teams were played.”³⁴ Pound countered opponents of her athletic teams by saying, “The health of no girl was ever injured, for it was only the most skillful who made the teams and the players through participation in the contests had one of the most enjoyable and valuable experiences of their lives.”³⁵ The short-lived explosion in women's sports at the University of Nebraska soon felt the disapproval of America's tradition-bound society.

Basketball was introduced to the University in 1895-1896 and expanded to intercollegiate competition for women in 1898. The young women took their game seriously; one student reported it was “not an unheard of thing to meet at a promenade a

³² “Girls' Basket Ball Decennial Souvenir.”

³³ Gretchen Schrag, “Pound, English Professor, Reveals Tales of Times When She Had Tennis, Bicycle, Golf Titles,” Daily Nebraskan 31, no. 92 (23 February 1932), 1, and Manley, 304.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

proud coed blushing behind a black eye received in the afternoon's practice."³⁶ Their fun soon came to an end in 1908. Louise Pound lamented: "When outsiders and a few others protested that girls were 'too frail of health' and 'too easily upset emotionally' to engage in competition in athletic sports, Nebraska's intercollegiate and other matches were given up."³⁷ In another interview, Pound said that the Dean of Women, Mrs. Edna M. Barkley, had stopped the intercollegiate games because she thought "such activity inadvisable for the girls' health."³⁸ After 1908, girls' basketball was limited to physical education classes.³⁹ Pound, however, did not give up her sports easily. In the course of her illustrious basketball career as a coach and player, Pound earned a Nebraska varsity "N." But basketball occupied only a fraction of Pound's time. She earned another "N" in her favorite game, tennis.⁴⁰

Tennis

Pound began showing off her athletic skills before basketball was even invented. She was the Lincoln city tennis champion in 1890 at age 18 and the women's state singles champion in 1891 and 1892.⁴¹ An even more remarkable feat, she defeated players of both sexes to become the University's tennis champion in men's singles from 1890-1892 and the runner-up in men's intercollegiate singles and doubles in 1891.⁴²

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Manley, 304.

³⁷ "Louise Pound, *The Athlete*."

³⁸ Yost, 484.

³⁹ Manley, 304.

⁴⁰ Yost, 478.

⁴¹ Longman.

⁴² "Louise Pound, *The Athlete*."

While in Lincoln, Pound was the only woman member of the city's tennis club during the 1890s and was considered almost unbeatable in singles.⁴³ One of the very few opponents she couldn't beat in tennis at the University was E.O. "Jumbo" Stiehm, the Cornhusker football coach. Pound admitted his physical advantage as a large person, but did not credit his victory with his sex, explaining, "He was too big. I couldn't hit the ball over his head, and I couldn't wear him out or get it out of his long reach."⁴⁴

Stretching her tennis skills further, she paired up with Yale religion professor Charles Foster Kent to become the Wayne County, New York gentlemen's doubles champion in 1894.⁴⁵ Returning to singles, Pound traveled to the University of Chicago to compete in the Women's Western Tennis Championship 1897.⁴⁶ Writing to her parents about the difficult game, Pound demonstrated her fiercely competitive spirit and rejection of ladylike sporting restraint:

There were but two matches this afternoon, and those were intense. . . .

Miss Wimer, a large tall muscular girl, with a powerful back-hand stroke, exasperating success in getting back the ball, playing for times as good a game as she has yet played in the tournament was making me run frantically from one corner of the court to the other, up and back, and working me to death. [Pound won, 7-5.]

So I hoped to have an easy time the second set, but gracious. She won

⁴³ Yost, 478.

⁴⁴ "Louise Pound Named to Journal's Sports Hall of Fame," Lincoln Journal file, unknown specific date of February 1955; last comment about "long reach" penciled into the margin by Pound on the Lincoln Journal Star's file copy.

⁴⁵ Yost, 478.

⁴⁶ Longman.

from me six-one. Remember I was playing just as hard as I know how. Every single game ran to deuce. Then went back and forth. Every single game, every single point was fought for for minutes. Time after time I would get "advantage" and lose the game. That girl got absolutely everything, and played a swifter game. Than any I have run across since I have been in Chicago. I was playing as hard as I could [and] never even served a double. Served to one side, then the other, down the middle line and she whacked everything back. I tried tricks. I tried everything. I was cool. I fought—and she beat me 6-1. I know I never worked so hard in my life at a set. . . .

All this time that she got me three love the deciding set, I was trying to follow Mr. Gardner's advice, and place, not send them swift, which suits her. She's swifter. On the fourth game, I succeeded, I placed down the side lines, and managed to get to the net. I won. Score 1-3. Then the girl gave out, while I was fresher and fresher. She served doubles and grew wild. I persisted and took the net. Soon 3-all. Then we fought, and I got the game. We fought again harder, and she won. Score 4-all. Was there suspense? The match hung on the next two games, and the crowd stopped cheering us and was breathless. I never played such tennis as in these last two games in my life. Luck was with me! and helped me down the side lines, on the base line. I don't know just how I got these two games, but I did. And the match was mine. And I was given a regular ovation. . .

I've made a name for myself now and have won a prize and am content.

Who could do better—do so well—with my experience?⁴⁷

In that contest, followed by an even more difficult but victorious championship bout, Pound became the ranking tennis player in the United States, even though she had not entered and never would enter a national tournament,⁴⁸ explaining that the contests were always before the end of school in June.⁴⁹

By 1899, Pound realized that as only an instructor at the University of Nebraska, she would never advance into the higher academic ranks of professor unless she pursued a Ph.D. degree. At the time, a degree from a German university was considered the ultimate in higher education, especially for linguistics.⁵⁰ Although she wanted to stay in Nebraska, Pound sought the best credentials and enrolled at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, where she earned her degree in two semesters instead of the usual seven, graduating magna cum laude. In a 1945 interview, Pound stated that “Winning that degree in two semesters was the hardest thing I ever did.”⁵¹ When she completed her degree, Pound returned to the University of Nebraska as an adjunct professor, advancing to full professor in 1912.⁵²

While at Heidelberg, Pound continued to rack up laurels and stun European spectators as a tennis champion, winning the Championship of Heidelberg in singles and doubles in 1899 and 1900.⁵³ Back in her beloved Nebraska, she became the Director of

⁴⁷ Letter from Louise Pound to her relatives while at the Western tennis championships at the University of Chicago, September 1897, Nebraska State Historical Society archives, Louise Pound collection.

⁴⁸ Yost, 478.

⁴⁹ Schrag, 1.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth A. Turner, “Legacy Profile: Louise Pound (1872-1958),” *Legacy* 9, no. 1 (1992), 61.

⁵¹ Haller, 558.

⁵² Turner, 61.

⁵³ Yost, 478.

the Nebraska Tennis Association for two years beginning in 1911.⁵⁴ Pairing with columnist Guy "Rolling Along" Williams, they won the men's doubles competition of the Lincoln city championships in 1913.⁵⁵ She won the Central Western doubles championship with Carrie Neely in Kansas City in 1915,⁵⁶ the Western doubles championship with Neely again in Chicago in 1915, and finally, became the president of the Lincoln Tennis Association in 1919.⁵⁷ By the 1920s, Pound had to give up tennis. "Bi-focal glasses wrecked my ground strokes. Whatever I hit went into the net."⁵⁸ Disappointed to lose at her favorite game, but not ready to retire from athletics, she switched her energies to a new sporting love, golf.

Golf and Other Sports

As Lincoln's ranking woman golfer from 1901-1927, Pound again proved to be the city's most gifted and versatile athlete.⁵⁹ She won the state golf championship in 1916 and the city championship title in 1925.⁶⁰ Again representing her sport's organizing associations, she was the vice-president of the Woman's Golf Association of Nebraska for 1916-1917.⁶¹ In a 1926 newspaper article, Pound and her perennial rival eclipsed the successes of many male golfers: "Mrs. Ross P. Curtice and Miss Louise Pound have a little joke all their own: . . . The number of times they have met as opponents in women's

⁵⁴ Longman.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Yost, 481.

⁵⁹ Longman.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

sports events in Lincoln. Whereas masculine champions rise and fall as readily as flowers bloom and wilt, these two women . . . [are] outstanding every year in which they take part in a tournament, beginning some years ago with tennis, and continuing into the days of golf.⁶² Three years later, the two women met again at a banquet gathering of “patriarch” women golfers, seated at either end in the places of honor as the “ultra-patriarchs.”⁶³

Although basketball, tennis, and golf claimed most of Pound’s time and interest, she excelled at many other activities. As the bicycle craze of the 1890s hit Lincoln, Pound became one of the first bicycle owners in the city. Unlike other women’s cycling habits, Pound’s bicycle was not used for “leisurely rides in shady streets and parks” but as a tool to help her to “get about faster to private tennis courts to organize and supervise tournaments.”⁶⁴ Century Clubs cropped up as the craze spread, counting as members cyclists who had ridden one hundred continuous miles in a twelve-hour period. Not a challenge for Pound, “Her auburn hair flamed frequently along Nebraska roads in the nineties as she piled up century road club bars.”⁶⁵ Her string of Century bars distinguished her as the only woman in the state to boast such an honor.⁶⁶ She also earned a Rambler Gold Medal for riding an unbelievable 5,000 miles in one year.⁶⁷

In the winter, Pound took to the ice. The ponds of Lincoln were too small for the contests of speed that she desired, so she picked up figure skating instead. In an article,

⁶² “Women Finalists in City Golf Tourney Rivals in Lincoln Sports for 25 Years,” Lincoln Sunday Star, 3 October 1926.

⁶³ Yost, 483.

⁶⁴ Yost, 484.

⁶⁵ Longman.

⁶⁶ “Louise Pound, The Athlete.”

she told of her favorite Christmas, when she received "a pair of skates from Rochester, New York, sent by a relative. I owned a pair of girl's skates, of inferior metal and having heel-cases of leather, but that day came real boy's skates of fine steel, fastening with the 'heel plates' then popular and having clamps at both toe and heel. I bought a ten-cent book and from it practiced figure skating to my heart's content."⁶⁸ In the days when "figure skating" consisted of actually carving elaborate figures in the ice rather than jumps and spins, Pound's book-learned skills soon manifested themselves into difficult maneuvers: "the Maltese Cross made backwards, the double Philadelphia grapevine, the On-To-Richmond, knitting, waltz and two-step."⁶⁹ When told she was probably the ranking figure skater in Lincoln at the time, she modestly explained that there were no competitors in nineteenth-century Nebraska and that the title, if she had it, was by default.⁷⁰ Continuing to skate into college, Pound captained the Co-ed Skating Club.⁷¹

Not content with only winter skating, Pound took up roller skating. Demonstrating her athletic skill as well as her wit, she devised a humorous contract between her, "Louise Pound, Ph.D., A.M., B.L., P.B.K., K.K.G., English Club, Black Masque, Silver Serpent, Xi Delta, L.W.C., A.C.A., E.S.L., M.L.A., U.L.S., A.D.S., expert," and friend "Marguerite McPhee, inexpert," for Pound to travel between their houses exclusively on roller skates in exchange for a chocolate-filled seven-layer cake.⁷² She also introduced skiing to Lincoln with friend Verna Edgren on a pair of skis imported

⁶⁷ Yost, 484.

⁶⁸ Louise Pound, "My Happiest Christmas--" Nebraska State Historical Society archives, Louise Pound collection.

⁶⁹ Longman.

⁷⁰ "Louise Pound, The Athlete."

⁷¹ The Sombrero, (University of Nebraska yearbook, 1892), 46.

from Sweden.⁷³ "There were a few hills in the city and we tried them all."⁷⁴ She excelled in swimming, horsemanship, bowling, and softball. Pound held the Lincoln high diving record,⁷⁵ played cricket with American and English students while studying in Heidelberg,⁷⁶ and mastered croquet when she was only fourteen.⁷⁷ According to her brother, Louise Pound could also play baseball with neighborhood boys: "She could pitch a good curve ball, could bat, throw and field with the best of us."⁷⁸

Retiring from her athletic pursuits one by one, Pound eventually lost interest in golf at around age 60, giving up her last athletic love after years of championships. An amazing athlete for most of her life, she refuting an article that reported "Dr. Pound gave up golf in the early 1930s to finish a book," to write that she had simply "had enough."⁷⁹ Some years later, Pound dismissed the sport's increasingly relaxed attitude: "Golf seems to be getting sissier. I see them riding around the course in electric carts now."⁸⁰ When Pound gave up golf, she did not replace the sport with another although she maintained a love of all sports, seeing every Husker football game for over 30 years.⁸¹ She continued to display the spirit of the "new athletic girl" as she vigorously pioneered new fields in English as one of the country's few women professors.

⁷² "Contract" between Louise Pound and Marguerite McPhee, University of Nebraska Archives.

⁷³ Longman.

⁷⁴ Yost, 487.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 487.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 479.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 478.

⁷⁸ Roscoe Pound.

⁷⁹ "Louise Pound Named to Journal's Sports Hall of Fame." Handwritten note "had had enough" by Louise Pound on the Lincoln Journal Star's file copy of the article.

⁸⁰ Yost, 483.

⁸¹ "Louise Pound Named to Journal's Sports Hall of Fame."

Teaching Career

Starting her teaching career in 1893 as a newly-graduated assistant in the English department, Louise Pound was already well-known around the campus as an outstanding athlete and a colorful figure, attaching a mystique to her that students felt unable to penetrate. Hartley Alexander, five years behind Pound as an undergraduate, wrote a stunning tribute to her in 1933, scratching at the mystery surrounding the famous teacher:

When Louise Pound first began to teach in the University of Nebraska she was already far better known to the majority of the student body than many of the professors of that day. . . . [Cited her athletic honors.] All these things were of course known to the students who are alive to athletics, I suspect, before scholarship seriously excites them; and they contributed not a little to a certain éclat which attached to the name of Louise Pound well before her intellectual interests were understood. Certainly it was a grand introduction for a young instructress . . .

No doubt to the student there appeared to be an incongruity in the combination in one young woman of great athletic skill and clear intellectual attainment: the two may accompany one another, and from time to time do so, as obviously here; and the union is not so infrequent as to entirely cause surprise, although at the same time it is sufficiently unusual as to excite comment when it does transpire. But this union, in Louise Pound's case, conspicuous as it was, by no means sufficed to explain the hold upon imagination which she exercised. There was something enigmatical about her personality, almost cryptic, and I

think that the feeling that here was an instructor whom no one could quite read was at the bottom responsible for a feeling akin to awe which in those days certainly touched the mind of many a youngster where she was concerned. And I wonder if even yet it is outgrown.⁸²

Already known as an athlete, Pound soon made a name for herself as a serious scholar in a time when few women became professional academics. Friend H.L. Mencken credited her with “putting the study of American English on its legs”⁸³ by arguing against the exclusive study of British English and for an exploration of American English as a living language worthy of study.⁸⁴ She also studied regional folklore and legends when scholars often ignored local traditions, earning international acclaim as a scholar and a teacher in these under-appreciated subjects.⁸⁵ As the *Saturday Review* once observed, Pound “is no doubt an erudite scholar, but she is also an observer of wide interests who writes with an ingratiating humor and unpretentiousness.” The *New York Herald Tribune* said, “She had been a genuine cultural force not only in her native Nebraska but throughout a wide area of the nation.”⁸⁶

Thoroughly loving her native Nebraska, she included her state and region as a backdrop for many of her own works. Former student B. A. Botkin, who achieved international fame as a scholar of folklore, wrote of Pound, “True to her pioneer heritage and her own folk philosophy, she has, in spite of the extensive variety of her interests . . . remained steadfastly loyal to her native Nebraska and Middle West, and has intensively

⁸² Hartley Alexander, “Louise Pound,” *Nebraska Alumnus*, October 1933, 3.

⁸³ Unknown writing, possibly the slipcover to Pound’s Selected Writings, University of Nebraska Archives.

⁸⁴ Turner, 59.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

cultivated her own vineyard.”⁸⁷ Pound loved Lincoln and especially the University of Nebraska deeply. “With her, as with every great teacher and scholar, education and research are more than a profession; they are a way of life.”⁸⁸ Choosing her scholarly way of live above marriage, she decided to remain unmarried and teach, without a single leave of absence, until her retirement in 1945, having published more than two hundred articles and books on folklore, English diction, literature, and even slang.⁸⁹ Like Mabel Lee, Louise Pound cultivated familial relationships with many of her students and came to look upon her work and career as her children. In her retirement, Pound remained erudite and would continually “astonish a nation of scholars unused to the company of ladies who know quite as much as they did.” Unlike popular conceptions of maiden schoolteachers, her humor, vitality, and interests “shattered for all time the popular conception of the ‘lady professor’ as schoolmarm, bluestocking, prig, or bookworm.”⁹⁰

Rapport with Students and Teachers

As Hartley Alexander explained, Louise Pound was somewhat enigmatic. Successful in every accomplishment, some found her overbearing. Added to her great success, she tended to see the University of Nebraska as a part of her personal life over which she exercised significant control. She had graduated from the University magna cum laude; her brother Roscoe, two years older and a University alumnus, became a

⁸⁶ Slipcover to Pound’s Selected Writings?

⁸⁷ B. A. Botkin, “Book Review: Selected Writings of Louise Pound,” Midwest Folklore 1, no. 1 (1951): 65.

⁸⁸ B. A. Botkin, “First Lady of Letters: Retrospective—1957,” Roundup: A Nebraska Reader, ed. Virginia Faulkner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1957), 232.

⁸⁹ Manley, 170.

⁹⁰ Botkin, “First Lady of Letters,” 235.

lawyer and dean at Harvard School of Law; and her sister Olivia, two years younger and also a University alumna, became a high school teacher and principal and a girls' vocational director in Lincoln.⁹¹ The Pounds therefore felt a bit of ownership in the University of Nebraska, their family institution. Chancellors avoided the difficult Pound because she tried to dictate to them how to administrate the University. Although many people found Pound hard to take, she also attracted a number of disciples who loved her dearly.

Graduate students, especially, found Pound delightful. Far from the curmudgeon others saw, her graduate students appreciated her generously offered advice regarding writing and advancement in the English profession. B. A. Botkin, a former graduate student and one of Pound's greatest eulogizers, once wrote that Pound's assistance stemmed from her own experience: "A pioneer and crusader in the fields of poetic and ballad origins and American English, she knew what it was to be lonely and under attack. What was more natural than for her to surround her disciples with the mutual aid and encouragement that give the scholar a feeling of security and the confidence that comes from knowing that one is not alone?"⁹² Serving as a guide, philosopher, and friend, Pound encouraged her students as their professor and advisor and often maintained the friendships long after the students' graduation.⁹³

After Pound's death in 1958, her brother and sister received many laudatory letters from former students expressing their joy at receiving the famous professor's help

⁹¹ Turner, 60.

⁹² Botkin, "Pound Sterling," 20.

⁹³ Turner, 61.

and support for their own work in English. Former student Mrs. Robert Lasch wrote: "For all of us, her students and her friends, she is truly immortal. Every day for as long as we live we will see her influence expressed in innumerable ways and the ideas that she implanted in us reflected in turn by our children and students."⁹⁴ B. A. Botkin remembered her as a great teacher "because she was a great person rather than, as in other cases I have known, because she exploited her personality. . . . And as a measure of the woman--her warm, simple, generous, and unassuming humanity--these grateful, gracious words may serve as her epitaph."⁹⁵ He found her humble, sympathetic, tactful, humorous, understanding, and free of the pedantic nature of many of his other professors.⁹⁶

Pound never lost the wit and vivacity of her childhood, endearing her to her students. Ruth Moore wrote: "with all her erudition, she preserved in every decade of her life a strictly contemporary viewpoint. It was something that went deeper than collecting up-to-date slang. After the 4 o'clock class in Old English she would sometimes fill 'Henry,' her little Ford car, with students and take them to the latest movie in town, saying that she felt it necessary to keep up with Rudolf Valentino and Clara Bow."⁹⁷ Her favorite former students created an informal alliance called the "Louise Pound Alumni Association," and Pound once said that that group's "devotion and loyalty" meant more to her than all her academic achievements and accolades. "I believe the pleasantest thing that has happened to me," she told a reporter on her retirement, "is that I've had a number

⁹⁴ Louise Pound Memorial Committee, Names 7, no. 1, (March 1959), University of Nebraska Archives.

⁹⁵ B. A. Botkin, "Louise Pound (1872-1956)," Western Folklore 18, no 3 (July 1959), University of Nebraska Archives.

⁹⁶ Botkin, "Pound Sterling," 21.

⁹⁷ Meredith, "The Pound Family of Lincoln, Nebraska."

of books dedicated to me.”⁹⁸

Not only graduate students found a friend in Louise Pound; several of her colleagues at the University of Nebraska remembered her fondly as well. As a formidable personality on campus, Pound used her privileged position as a celebrity to help less fortunate colleagues: “Pound’s sportsman’s creed, its emphasis on fairness and clean play, has often led her to leap into situations where a less forceful, less justice-loving person might fear to tread. Through the course of her 50 years at Nebraska she has several times interceded with deans, even chancellors, in behalf of an instructor whose head was on the block.”⁹⁹ Dismissing rumors to the contrary, one journalist reported that, “There has never been room, nor time, for pettiness in Louise Pound’s life. Always she has been willing to jeopardize her own position for the greater good of justice.”¹⁰⁰ Friend and former English department colleagues Mamie Jane Meredith agreed: “There are others besides myself who probably wouldn’t have found it bearable to remain here [at the University of Nebraska] if Louise Pound hadn’t stayed here to champion just causes, whether popular or unpopular. She, more than almost anyone else I know, is free from envy and jealousy.”¹⁰¹

Meredith, herself a devoted disciple of Louise Pound, indicated that the famous teacher also enjoyed the honor of being a favorite teacher among all students, not just those in the English department. In spite of her busy schedule of teaching, writing,

⁹⁸ B. A. Botkin, “Louise Pound (1872-1956).”

⁹⁹ Evelyn Simpson, “Louise Pound, Sports Champion . . . and Teacher,” Sunday [Omaha] World Herald Magazine, June 1945, sec. C.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Letter from Mamie Jane Meredith to Mr. Max J. Herzberg, editor of Work Study, 9 May 1938, University of Nebraska archives.

editing, and aiding professional societies, she often found time "to join University girls for hamburgers or ice cream at college lunch counters or picnics."¹⁰² Professional colleagues agreed; as a noted personality, Pound enjoyed rapt attention at speaking engagements: "She travels from coast to coast, east, west, south, giving addresses which skillfully combine learning, wit, and appeal. If she's asked to speak 20 minutes, she speaks 19, while her hearers are still wishing her to continue."¹⁰³ Although many found Louise Pound to be a hardheaded, irritating, and meddling member of Lincoln's elite, students and teachers often cracked her gruff exterior to find a genuine friend and ally, "the wonder of faculty and students," beneath the famous surface.¹⁰⁴

Concern with Women

As one of the first female university professors in America, Pound took a special interest in furthering the causes of her gender. With no time for Victorian restraints or traditional feminine roles, Pound found early on that she could defeat men physically as well as mentally. Encouraged by her own successes, Pound felt that women had no reason to be held back in any arena. Zealous about the benefits of college education for women, she blasted the status quo: "At present about the only prestige a girl can win is to be made by men students a 'sweetheart' or a 'prom girl' or 'queen of the west,' and this is not for achievement or skill or superiority of some kind but by masculine selection,

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Dorothy Canfield Fisher to Olivia Pound, 7 July 1958, records of Dr. Sue Rosowski, Dept. of English, University of Nebraska.

mostly on the basis of personal appearance or clothes.”¹⁰⁵ Although she hated the restraints put on women by men, she did not hate men. She enjoyed the company of her brother, male students, and male teachers around campus. Capable in her own right but not a militant feminist, one writer remembered her gratefully accepting assistance offered by a male journalist to shovel her snow-covered walks, saying “I was just going to do it myself.”¹⁰⁶ Her self-sufficient attitude and devotion to gender equality in education earned her devoted followers in generations of women students.¹⁰⁷ As an exceptional woman herself, she dismissed the argument that only exceptional women could handle the rigors of sports, education, and academia while other, less-capable women would probably fail and injure their health in trying. In a 1920 address, she said, “When a man does well, it is taken for granted that he is typical. When a woman does well (so strong is the tradition), it is still thought to need explanation; and it is taken for granted that she is not typical, but the product of special circumstances.”¹⁰⁸

Awards

As Pound continued to break boundaries for women, several organizations took notice. In 1955, at the age of eighty-two, Pound received two special honors. The first was the election as president of the Modern Language Association, English’s primary professional organization. Pound was the first woman in the organization’s nearly 100-

¹⁰⁵ Schrag, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Botkin, “First Lady of Letters,” 235.

¹⁰⁷ Roscoe Pound.

¹⁰⁸ Don Walton, “Louise Pound, and Boston on the Plains,” Lincoln Star, 8 June 1988.

year history to be so honored.¹⁰⁹ This brought the number of Pound's national presidencies to three (American Folklore Society, American Dialect Society, and the Modern Language Association)¹¹⁰ while serving, at various times, as the chairman of three sections within the University of Nebraska's English department (American Literature, Contemporary English, and Comparative Literature).¹¹¹

One month later, she was elected to the Lincoln Journal's Nebraska Sports Hall of Fame for her accomplishments as a basketball coach, tennis champion, golfer, cyclist, and overall pioneer in women's sports.¹¹² As the fourteenth inductee into the Hall of Fame, she was also the first woman.¹¹³ Shortly after her election, one journalist wrote a tribute to Pound:

Times were when women combined brain and brawn . . .

Played men's rules in basketball because the feminine version was "too sissy" . . .

And a woman won the men's tennis singles.

Times now are when an 82-year-old Lincoln lady keeps tabs on current--not past--sports figures.

Remembers a 100-mile trip on a bicycle . . .

And is elected to the Lincoln Journal's Nebraska Sports Hall of Fame.

The lady? Dr. Louise Pound, scholar, author, editor, folklorist, teacher--and also

¹⁰⁹ Meredith, "The Pound Family of Lincoln, Nebraska."

¹¹⁰ Scott, 6.

¹¹¹ Louise Pound file, Nebraska State Historical Society, introduction to Record RG0912.

¹¹² Turner, 59-60.

¹¹³ Yost, 487.

sports woman.¹¹⁴

Her response to the twin honors was punctuated by her characteristic dry humor. In a letter to B. A. Botkin, Pound wrote, "My local MLA notice had a few lines: 'Dr. Louise Pound was elected the first woman president of the Modern Language Association. . . .' I'm still being asked which society I'm president of. Now comes unexpected election to the Nebraska Sports Hall of Fame. Here I am alongside a celebrated baseball pitcher, a wrestler, two runners, football players, etc., with a real fanfare—and some inaccuracies of course. First woman again.—Life has its humors."¹¹⁵

Unlike most women of her day, Louise Pound found athletic success easily, pursuing her physical gifts at the highest levels for almost forty years. Combined with her amazing athletic skills was her notable career as a pioneer in English. Excelling at almost everything she tried, Pound's modern viewpoint and position as a "new type of athletic girl" freed her from concern with societal restrictions in athletics, academics, or in her profession. Pound's ferociously competitive spirit was tolerated in the relatively small and Pound family-dominated town of Lincoln, but was not allowed in more conservative communities. The atypical Louise Pound could not understand the reasons behind others' urge of "moderation" for emerging women athletes. Loved by students and some colleagues, Pound's view of the University of Nebraska as her "turf" incited the fury of administrators, chancellors, and deans as she attempted to influence decisions over which she exercised no legitimate authority. Never deterred in her beliefs, Louise

¹¹⁴ Dick Becker, "No Sissy, She," Nebraska Alumnus 46, no 3 (March 1955), 24.

¹¹⁵ Botkin, "Pound Sterling," 29.

Pound would soon meet powerful opposition in the equally formidable Mabel Lee.

CHAPTER 3: MABEL LEE AND LOUISE POUND MEET:

DISCORD ON CAMPUS

Mabel Lee's and Louise Pound's views on women's athletics took positions on either end of a very broad spectrum of public opinion. America was emerging from the Victorian era; a time when middle and upper class women sought to minimize exertion in order to exude fragile femininity. By the turn of the century, new middle class women began to rebel from their Victorian confines, leading to a short-lived explosion in sports activity characterized by Louise Pound's University of Nebraska women's varsity basketball team. By the end of the century's first decade, however, opinion in middle class circles about women's sports began to shift back to a more conservative view. Highly competitive and even rough athletics for women resumed their previous distinction as possibly harmful and definitely unladylike. Mabel Lee's Victorian background and Louise Pound's position as a modern "new woman" influenced their radically different views on women's sports. The University of Nebraska furnished the setting for the clash between these two powerful women, a clash that was less about women than about evolving class values.

Mabel Lee received her professional physical education training in Boston, far from Pound's successful varsity team and a decade after its heyday. Lee's education included training in gymnastics, field hockey, and basketball, but competition was minimized and "healthful recreation" maximized. At the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics, Lee learned that athletics were for all women, regardless of ability. The

weak or disinclined would not be able to escape physical education's positive, health-enriching benefits; conversely, the highly skilled would not be able to branch out to form elite teams. All women would enjoy the same level of athletics, instructed in proper form and rules by professionally trained women physical education instructors.

Lee's views ran in direct opposition to Pound's. As Lincoln's Babe Didrikson, Louise Pound excelled in basketball, tennis, golf, cycling, figure skating, and a myriad of other activities. Enjoying enormous success herself, Pound was loathe to accept what she considered the "sissy" athletics offered by physical educators like Mabel Lee. She believed that women could and should compete in spirited and highly competitive athletics just as men did, enjoying victory as well as defeat in tests of strength, endurance, and skill. Rather than viewing Mabel Lee's physical education program as uplifting all women in healthful play, she saw it as a return to Victorian restraints. As pioneering women in the field of athletics, both Lee and Pound developed separate philosophies about sports. Lee advocated physical education for everyone and Pound advocated elite sporting opportunities for gifted female athletes.

As a relatively isolated college campus, the University of Nebraska offered no escape for either woman. Each was a highly respected woman in her own field and each eventually became the first woman head of her respective professional organization; Lee as president of the American Physical Education Association in 1931 and Pound as president of the Modern Language Association in 1955. Each believed in her own views on athletics to the point of fanaticism. Each remained single for her entire life, devoting herself wholeheartedly to her work. Each was used to being a pioneer in her field and

having to fight men for respect and equality. Neither was used to clashing with other women on issues relating to women. As two big fish in the relatively small pond of the University of Nebraska, each became territorial and defensive toward the other woman as a threat to the feminine solitude in which each had become accustomed to working. Lee enjoyed an advantage because she was the University's head of the physical education department while Pound was only an English professor, thus exerting no official clout on the subject of women's athletics. Pound, however, grew up in Lincoln, attended the University as an undergraduate, and immediately accepted a teaching position there after completing her studies. She enjoyed extensive and powerful connections that Lee, as an outsider, could not match. Both stubborn women, Lee pursued her objectives in a demure, polished, socially graceful manner. Pound, much more direct and less concerned with tact, developed a reputation as a battle-ax among administrators subjected to her demands. Lee and Pound's extreme views collided shortly after Lee's arrival at the University of Nebraska in 1924, leading the two women into an open animosity that lasted for the remainder of their lives; Pound's friends continuing to hound Lee after Pound's death in 1958.

Early Days in the Women's Physical Education Department

Before Mabel Lee came to Nebraska, the women's physical education department at the University of Nebraska ran much differently than the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics ideal. In the years after the turn of the century, the women's gymnasium director, Mrs. Anne Barr Clapp, enthusiastically pursued athletics for women, enlisting

the aid of young dynamo and graduate student Louise Pound as an assistant. In 1902, the University of Nebraska yearbook The Sombrero reported the most interest in athletics and gymnastics by young women ever. Also mentioned was the girls' varsity basketball team, "always in great favor. So far they have won all match games played with outside teams. An effort is being made to bring about more of an inter-collegiate interest in athletics for women, and it is to be hoped that before many years college women may enjoy the privilege of friendly contests with each other."¹ Five years later, while basketball maintained its position as the favorite activity in the women's athletic program, Mrs. Clapp added track and field events for women, consisting of the 25-yard dash, the hurdle race, the running high jump, the shot put, and the fence vault. Each event had at least six contestants with the hurdles and the 25-yard dash attracting many more. Gymnastic competitions appeared for the first time including exercises on the horse, the parallel bars, and the flying rings. "Thus with these three departments,—basket-ball, athletic contests, and gymnastic contests,—girls' athletics is gaining a larger place in the life of the girls in the University of Nebraska."²

In 1908, Mrs. Clapp resigned her position due to pregnancy.³ The same year, administrators cancelled intercollegiate contests for fear of the women's health in favor of strictly intramural competition. In 1924, Mrs. Clapp authored a page in the yearbook that celebrated advances made by women in athletics since the turn of the century, yet mourned the passing of a more tolerant era almost twenty years before. Discussing the

¹ The Sombrero (University of Nebraska yearbook, 1902), 176.

² The Cornhusker (Renamed University of Nebraska yearbook, 1907), 199.

³ Robert E. Knoll, Prairie University: A History of the University of Nebraska, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 77.

benefits of basketball, she said that "It was the first real sport offered them which called into play the physical energy so long pent up by social tradition."⁴ Only physically fit girls in the gymnastic classes were eligible to play on the basketball team, and after a year or two, the University of Nebraska's team defeated so many opponents that only the most skilled could make the team. The first women's game with an outside team, the YWCA of Council Bluffs "created intense excitement not only in the University but in the city as well. The night of the game the Armory was filled to its capacity by a most enthusiastic crowd, composed entirely of women and University girls, who know little or nothing of the game."⁵ Men were excluded because of modesty concerns.

It had been sixteen years since the last women's intercollegiate game, yet memories of the games' electric atmosphere still impressed Mrs. Clapp. Basketball reigned as an elite intercollegiate sport for women for several years until its cancellation, according to Mrs. Clapp, "much to the disappointment of our team and the girls in general, as these trips to sister universities meant much to them. Teas, luncheons, drives, and entertainment at the homes of the girls made these inter-collegiate games most delightful. At least two faculty women always accompanied the team and were very careful that not the slightest criticism could be made of the conduct of the girls even in those days when public opinion was much more critical than now."⁶

Public Opinion

⁴ Anne Barr Clapp, "Women's Athletics," The Cornhusker (1924), 434.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Mrs. Clapp was right to fear impropriety or negative public opinion of her women's athletics. Public opinion could have easily crushed her fledgling athletic program at any time. Around the turn of the century, Americans did not know what to make of women's athletics. Medical science still being relatively primitive, especially for women, much opinion on women's athletics stemmed from Victorian beliefs about women's physical abilities or from quasi-scientific studies "proving" the terrible toll athletics would wreak on a woman's childbearing and maternal abilities. Relegated mostly to mild exercises in a gymnasium in the 1890s, women's athletics suddenly bloomed in the 1900s, only to be shut down again by the 1910s, public opinion never condoning the type of rough play undertaken by women in these years. By the 1920s and 1930s, public opinion slowly began to accept the possibility of health benefits resulting from women's activity, questioning the negative medical opinion of feminine exertion that had been taken as fact for years before. In 1929, a woman doctor employed by The Forum magazine conducted an independent survey of women's athletics. While far from proving the necessity of physical activity for women, her survey could not detect the reputed harmful effects of women's sports: "If The Forum's survey has accomplished nothing more, it has at least made it impossible henceforth for anyone to contend that athletics have a pernicious effect either on women's general health or childbirth. Instead of this, such conclusions as may be drawn indicate that the sports and games so popular with the modern girl have helped rather than hurt her."⁷

⁷ Linda Gage Roth, "Are Sports HARMFUL to Women?" The Forum 81 (May 1929), 318.

Not everyone shared The Forum's optimism. Three months after the magazine's article, Frederick Rand Rogers, a noted physical educator, attempted to prove the harmful effects of women's competitive athletics. Particularly, he sought prevention of expanded participation by women in the upcoming 1932 Olympic Games. Reverting to folk wisdom and his own personal perceptions, Rogers pointed out that men's sports contained many negative factors unfortunate in high-level competition. While these evils could be overcome by men, women facing the same negatives would almost surely destroy their femininity, grace, and health. Rogers explained that Olympic competition encouraged psychic conflicts resulting from the intense desire to win. "The immediate consequences of this psychic conflict yield such fruits as suspicion, envy and hate rather than confidence, pleasure, and friendship. The very threat of personal defeat or hope of glory tends to convert every competitive activity into a gladiatorial show. The game ceases to be the end and becomes only a means to secure personal privilege and satisfy selfish pride."⁸

Beyond psychic strain was the threat of aesthetic loss. Rogers noted that "deforming effects are inescapable. The physical strain of intensive competition render the faces of athletes puffy and bloodless; psychic strains result in tendencies to hard lines and fixed scowls, and accidents often result in broken noses, disfiguring cuts, bloodshot eyes and like deformities. Thus the countenances of overspecialized athletes tend to grow less and less attractive because of athletic activities."⁹ These athletic deformations could be excused in men, but allowing women to undertake the same struggle would be socially

⁸ Dr. Frederick Rand Rogers, "Olympics for Girls?" School and Society 30 (10 August 1929), 190-1.

irresponsible. In his most outrageous claim, the respected educator attempted to explain the fundamental differences in the sexes, leaning on traditional Victorian sex roles for support: "men are more animal-like, mobile, energetic, aware, while women are more plant-like, more closely attached to the soil, to home, and quieter by nature."¹⁰ Finally, Rogers stated, "Natural feminine health and attractiveness, whether physical, emotional or social, certainly are impaired if not destroyed by the belligerent attitudes and competitive spirit the development of which intense athletic activity inevitably fosters. One has only to postulate a female Roosevelt to reduce to absurdity the claims of those who foster the masculinization of girls."¹¹

American girls were caught on the horns of a dilemma. In one camp, modern women like Mrs. Clapp and Louise Pound in Nebraska advocated all-out competition for women, including intercollegiate games that could get quite rough. In the other camp were conservative Victorians like Mabel Lee and Frederick Rand Rogers, who would absolutely not allow highly competitive athletics for women due to health concerns or social taboos. This polarized topic encouraged many opinions seeking a single solution for all women. One man, a former director of a university fine arts department, spoke out against women's overemphasis on college pursuits and career preparation as taking away from a woman's real career, wifehood and motherhood.¹² Another man, a physical educator from the University of Michigan, advocated the development of intercollegiate athletics for women to stem some women's "... yelling their heads off over men's

⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² "Modern Girls Should Turn to Homemaking," *Daily Nebraskan* 31, no. 92 (23 February 1932), 1.

games, wasting their time and energy following men's teams, and making fools of themselves over men athletes."¹³ Intercollegiate athletics for women, he believed, would encourage these girls to interest themselves in their own games and discourage embarrassing displays at men's games. In this divided atmosphere, women's athletics developed by fits and starts: women could participate in the Olympic Games (albeit in limited numbers of events), but were still banned from intercollegiate athletics in most schools.

Public opinion, allayed at the University of Nebraska for several years around the turn of the century, allowed several sports for its women athletes. Field hockey joined the athletic choices for women in 1899, but was quickly cancelled due to lack of playing space. Track and field also appeared in 1899, offering a second choice for intercollegiate competition. Soccer and swimming, introduced in 1908, remained intramural sports.¹⁴ The University of Nebraska became one of the first schools to offer such broad opportunities for women to participate in athletics. After the demise of intercollegiate athletics, the women's gymnasium continued to offer a variety of intramural activities for its female athletes, but physical education majors found the program desperately wanting in professional preparation courses.

Enter Mabel Lee

¹³ Mabel Lee, Memories Beyond Bloomers (Washington D.C.: American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, 1978), 83.

¹⁴ Anne Barr Clapp, "Women's Athletics."

Visiting the University of Nebraska in 1924, Mabel Lee found the program to be much different from the ones she had been used to in her previous positions at Coe College, the Oregon Agricultural College, and Beloit College. She reported that the women's physical education department offered only gymnastics for credit and that the department only worked from 9 am to 3 pm on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. No teachers were available other than these times, leading the girls in the Women's Athletic Association (WAA) program to run their own after-school sports with their own equipment.¹⁵ Lee stated that the physical education majors were in a "near-riot" when she interviewed for the position as head of the physical education department, protesting the cycle of Nebraska physical education alumnae obtaining teaching positions at the University, thus allowing for no new ideas or outside input.

At the time, the head football coach at Nebraska presided over all athletics. Under the coach were the director of physical education for men, who was also head of all teacher training in physical education for both men and women; and the director of physical education for women, who was head of all physical education and athletics for the women students excluding professional courses.¹⁶ This intolerable situation infuriated the women because in most schools, male physical educators met the qualifications for their position only if they had been a competent athlete as an undergraduate, yet women, denied the opportunity to compete in athletics, trained for their positions at special physical education schools. Women physical educators thus felt eminently more qualified to educate women students and train future physical educators, but had to bow

¹⁵ Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 30.

to the whims of the male physical education director and, at the University of Nebraska, the head football coach as unqualified superiors in charge of the women's department.

During the course of Lee's weekend interview trip to the University, she met several of the faculty women and immediately sensed hostility from them.¹⁷ The women told her of a proposed parade down Lincoln's main thoroughfare, O Street, to be held in conjunction with a women's track meet. The parade would feature the female athletes wearing shorts, a new and controversial style, to attract public attention for the meet. At Lee's immediate condemnation of the spectacle, the women relaxed, although Lee never felt completely comfortable with several of the women.¹⁸ Returning to the chancellor's office at the end of her trip, Lee listed the problems evident in the department, including "subservience of women to men incompetent to be heads over women's work . . . lack of cooperation within the women's staff plus lack of loyalty to each other or to the department . . . and facilities which were entirely too limited."¹⁹ She added a final complaint about the administration of the University's Women's Athletic Association, a national group that awarded to women an elaborate series of awards for athletic achievement in intramural sports: "that since no woman on the staff cared to be bothered with extracurricular activities, the Women's Athletic Association was completely under the control of a sportswoman from another department. This I could not countenance were I head of the department."²⁰ This "sportswoman" was the influential Louise Pound.

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 8.

²⁰ Ibid.

Removing Pound's influence would prove to be extraordinarily more difficult than Lee expected.

After much wrangling, Lee agreed to take the position, accepting \$3,500 per year salary, a full professorship, and an assistant of her choosing at \$1,800 per year salary.²¹ Not realizing at the time that her bachelor's degree and two years of specialized professional training had put her in a highly desired minority, Lee scarcely understood the envy with which other faculty members viewed her. The few other women with full professorships were all graduates of the University of Nebraska (Pound was one), and with only fourteen years of teaching experience in other colleges, Lee "little realized then how favored I was, considering the many years of service of the other women professors there before they achieved full professorial rank."²² She later realized that "Good salaries, the choicest titles and academic recognition came to those few of us [professionally educated physical educators] easily."²³ Comparing salaries, she discovered that only four women (including Louise Pound) made more money than her, each with ten to thirty years on the faculty. She also noted that only the chancellor and the dean of the Medical College made more money than the head football coach, commenting, "Football seemed to be the tail that wagged the dog at Nebraska."²⁴

Persuaded by Chancellor Avery to accept her position under men's physical education director Dr. Clapp for the first year or two, Lee chaffed under a man's direction. While most women undertook the physical education major in order to become

²¹ Ibid., 9-10.

²² Ibid., 11.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 10.

physical education instructors themselves, many men in the department were intercollegiate athletes, especially football players, who took the major as an alternative to more difficult studies. Lee eventually got her way by flunking several football stars in her classes so that the men nearly begged to separate the class sections.²⁵ Not even happy with the women students, Lee viewed the department as a "dumping ground for other departments to get rid of undesirables and for girls who . . . thought that by donning a gym suit and romping about for four years that they could easily pick up a degree."²⁶ She undertook a "rigorous screening process" and finally came up with a group of diligent young women.²⁷ Lee, territorial about her department, was unwilling to teach courses to those not interested in becoming serious physical education instructors. The problem persisted: as late as 1976, a noted physical educator wrote that the presence of varsity athletes in physical education departments tended to lower standards not because they were not bright, but because they did not aspire to be physical education teachers but rather professional athletes or coaches at the college level.²⁸

Lee Meets with Opposition

After Mrs. Clapp's departure from the women's gymnasium in 1908, Louise Pound served as the women's unofficial sports mentor, her own athletic career spanning into the 1930s. Pound, unaware of Lee's background, excitedly courted the newly-hired Lee, hoping that at last the University women would be able to revive their intercollegiate

²⁵ Ibid., 39.

²⁶ Ibid., 38.

²⁷ Ibid., 39.

²⁸ Henry J. Montoye, "Our Profession Has An Inferiority Complex," The Black and Gold Bulletin 40 (The

matches in basketball, track, and gymnastics, while expanding into other sports. After months of friendly overtures, Pound finally realized that Lee's objectives at the University included no such activities. Lee wrote that "when [Pound] discovered that she could not dictate to me how to conduct sports for women, [she] dropped all friendly advances. She had been more than cordial at first, in fact embarrassingly so, but she later developed into my severest critic, becoming a thorn in my flesh for all the rest of my long tenure at the university, even past her retirement to the time of her death."²⁹

In her autobiography, Lee remembered with bitterness her first confrontations with Pound. Pound used to come to her office, trying to influence Lee's administration of the physical education department. Tactfully, Lee avoided the issue of her sports philosophy, leaving Pound ignorant of how violently their views opposed each other. Frustrated with the constant interruptions by a woman not even affiliated with the department, Lee complained to the chancellor:

"So she is trying to pull you, too, around by the nose," the chancellor exclaimed. He was surprised at this turn of events for shortly after my arrival this woman had congratulated him on his determination to have the department reorganized and freed of male domination. She said she was particularly pleased over his selection of me to head up the department.

Phi Epsilon Kappa Fraternity Newsletter), no. 1 (October 1976), 1.

²⁹ Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 44.

“In my 15 years as chancellor, bringing you here is the only thing I have ever done that has pleased her. And now you, too, are in her dog house.” Then after a long silence, he added, “That woman is a thorn in my flesh.”³⁰

Once Pound realized that Lee was not about to organize intercollegiate teams, she complained loudly around campus that she had found Lee out “as a sham.”³¹ Later, Lee reflected on Pound’s interest in women’s athletics. She said that Pound “was not interested in those who did not excel, she had no time for them. She was a coach rather than a sportswoman.”³² Neither a coach nor a sportswoman herself, Lee sought to administer sports for young women almost as a doctor would prescribe medicine for a patient: girls might like physical education or they might not, but either way it was good for them and Lee was going to make sure each and every girl took her required hours.

Lee encountered much resistance in trying to press her universal physical education, and not all of it was from Pound. In vogue in the first decades of the century were “correctives,” physical therapy exercises designed to correct posture problems. Lee herself had undergone correctives to elongate a short leg and to straighten a curved spine.³³ Seeing the benefits of correctives firsthand, Lee became an ardent advocate. Correctives were either not emphasized or nonexistent at every college in which Lee taught, and the University of Nebraska offered no exception. The common practice at the time was to excuse weak or unhealthy girls from physical education. Lee, believing physical education to be indispensable for every single girl, demanded that the University

³⁰ Ibid., 45.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Casaccio.

³³ Lee, Bloomer Girl, 109.

Health Service stop granting waivers to unfit girls, sending them instead to her to engage in correctives. "This concern for the physically inadequate caused a great uproar in certain parts of the campus, with most disapproving of my philosophy of what physical education was for."³⁴ Louise Pound who, according to Lee, was not interested in the unfit, may have been a leader in this stand against her rival.

Relatively isolated, the University of Nebraska relied on former students to fill many teaching positions. Because of this "inbreeding," Lee found herself to be without allies on several occasions. As one of the few outsiders, Lee found fellow faculty members to be parochial and mired in tradition. She discovered that "Everything, it seemed, was judged by whether it was the way it had been done at Nebraska in years past. Nothing seemed to matter except that the status quo be undisturbed. Every move I made to bring about any change seemed to be interpreted by many Nebraskans as disloyalty to the university."³⁵

Basketball

One of the university's many traditions was its female students' love of basketball. The game was invented by YMCA worker James Naismith in 1891 as an indoor activity for winter months' recreation.³⁶ The original rules, designed for men's play, interested women but were deemed too rough for feminine contest. Senda Berenson, a graduate of Lee's alma mater, the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics,

³⁴ Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 34.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 45-6.

³⁶ Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 99, s.v. "basketball."

asked the American Physical Education Association to set up a committee to modify the rules for women's use. As physical education's primary national organization, the APEA's committee produced what they considered to be "official" women's rules in 1901.³⁷ Lee recognized these rules as the first set of official women's rules and always credited Berenson with the invention of women's basketball.³⁸ Louise Pound recognized a different set of rules as being the first "official" women's rules, writing: "Confusion has prevailed for a long time, some teams playing by the women's rules as formulated at the Conference on Physical Training held at Springfield in 1899, some by these rules slightly modified, some by men's rules in their latest formulation, and some by the men's game slightly modified. At present hardly any two women's teams are to be found which recognize the same fouls, or interpret many of the rules in the same way."³⁹ Because of this confusion, Pound and Mrs. Clapp jointly published a set of rules used by the women's teams at the University of Nebraska, hoping that other teams might adopt their rules and thus become standardized.

In her autobiography, Lee reported that she had come across Pound's basketball rules in her early teaching career "and had been placed on the defensive about them." Although no standardized basketball rules existed, Lee called Pound's rules "controversial" and dismissed her as not being a member of her profession, writing that when she first ran across Pound's rules, she had no idea where Pound was from or who

³⁷ Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 182.

³⁸ Lee, Bloomer Girl, 175.

³⁹ Louise Pound, "Girls' Basketball in the University of Nebraska," Decennial Souvenir, 1896-1906, June 1906, Nebraska State Historical Society archives.

92

she was and that none in her physical education profession had the slightest idea either.⁴⁰

Rejecting Pound's competitive basketball rules, in 1925 Lee changed the women's two-court basketball intramural game at Nebraska to Berenson's milder three-court style.⁴¹

Strenuously objecting to spectator sports, Lee supported guidelines set up by some state departments of education (including New York, New Jersey, and California) that allowed spectator sports but attempted to keep the activities "sane." Lee listed some of the rules adopted to quell rising interest in winning girls' basketball teams:

1. No varsity practice in the sport before December 1.
2. Only two practices per week each no longer than one hour.
3. Health examinations of participants by school or approved physician.
4. No contests until January.
5. No more than one game per week and that in the afternoon and only nine per season.
6. No games that keep students away from home over night.
7. Sport in charge of properly-trained women instructors, but if from necessity a man is in charge, he must have special training in the field of physical education with a woman assistant as advisor and chaperone.
8. No girls' games in connection with boys' games.
9. No girls' games involving commercialism.
10. No admission charge to girls' games—the contests to be financed by the schools.

⁴⁰ Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 45.

11. All publicity of games under control of the principal of the school and it should emphasize the sport, not individual players.

12. No participation in games during menstrual periods.

13. Submerge these contests as much as possible in favor of intramurals.⁴²

Louise Pound, the former star and coach of Nebraska's perennially winning basketball team, and Mabel Lee, crazy about basketball in her childhood and who single-handedly introduced the sport to her high school, clashed again over the direction of women's basketball at the University. Pound envisioned public games involving thousands of spectators where sweaty women played a rough game with all their hearts. Lee wanted a quiet game with no spectators, where women tossed the ball to each other in a friendly manner before the end of the gym class.

The clash occurred in an indirect manner in 1928. Lee, her department relegated to the corner of the men's dilapidated physical education building, waited for years for a promised new building just for women's physical education. Finally, Chancellor Burnett alerted Lee that funds and space were available for a new building and that she and her staff should work on blueprints immediately. She was overjoyed to finally have the money to build a facility that would incorporate all of the department's needs, "one large gymnasium floor, one smaller all-purpose floor, a dance studio, a swimming pool, a correctives room, plus accompanying necessary dressing and shower rooms, several offices, a general departmental office, a lecture room and a study room for majors, to start

⁴¹ "Directors of Women's Sports," The Cornhusker (1925), 523.

⁴² Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 229. Lee's footnote: "Arranged from New York State Department of Education, 'Recommendations for Schools In Which Interschool Competition in Basketball Exists,' NRA Newsletter: Nov. 1, 1930."

on." Before Lee was done with the initial draft, the chancellor called for her to discuss a set of plans. At the meeting, the chancellor commented on the small expense of the proposed plans, saying "If you will give me your written endorsement of these [blueprints] to submit to the regents I believe we can get at this building right away. I find on a quick estimate it will not cost nearly as much as I feared you would feel you need."⁴³ Lee was stunned to realize that the chancellor already had a set of plans that she had not given him.

Looking at the chancellor's blueprints, she saw that they were for a building that contained "one basketball court with large space on both sides for spectators, a small swimming pool, also with space for spectators at the expense of the size of the pool, two or three offices, and small dressing and shower rooms, and nothing else."⁴⁴ Horrified, she learned that Louise Pound and her cronies had submitted the alternative plans for the new physical education building. A letter with the plans said that the women "wished to restore to the university the days at the turn of the century when its women's basketball teams triumphed over the high schools of the state and the neighboring universities."⁴⁵ Lee, angered that the plans called for spaces only for a few small teams, immediately rejected the plans as totally inadequate. The surprised chancellor told Lee that due to funding restraints, she could either have the smaller building (proposed by Pound) or no new building at all. Finding more room at the old Grant Memorial Hall for her department (the men's department had recently moved into the new Coliseum) than in the

⁴³ Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 60.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 61.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

proposed building, she rejected the building outright and elected to stay in the old building until funds could be found for an adequate structure.⁴⁶

Lee's rejection of Pound's plans stoked the fires of their animosity to a new level. Pound announced on campus, in Lincoln, and in Nebraska that Lee, by rejecting a new women's building, had "sold the university women down the river."⁴⁷ Shortly after this encounter, Pound's pet organization, the American Association of University Women (AAUW), featured the prominent English teacher as a guest speaker. According to Lee, Pound announced that "the new director of physical education for women at Nebraska . . . was holding up progress. But she admonished her listeners not to worry because a committee of prominent women throughout the state was organized to get rid of me which they hoped soon to accomplish."⁴⁸ Alerted by a friend in the AAUW audience of this plot, Lee ran to the chancellor with the story. When this group approached the chancellor on behalf of the women students to get rid of Lee, the alerted chancellor rebuffed the group.⁴⁹

Much later, Lee learned the reasons for the strange blueprints' submittal. Before the University hired Lee, Pound and her friends drew up plans for a new women's gymnasium so that the women students might escape from under the thumb of Dr. Clapp, the men's physical education department head. The plans were laid aside after the arrival of Lee but were resurrected when the Pound group learned that Lee was drawing up her own plans for a new building not to include a large space for girls' basketball and

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

spectators. Surprised that Pound, an English teacher, had proposed the plans and not Lee, the chancellor arranged the fateful meeting with Lee.⁵⁰ The differences in Lee's and Pound's philosophies manifested themselves in the vastly dissimilar building plans. This incident was just one more battle in the lifelong war between the two prominent educators for control of women's athletics at the University of Nebraska.

Spectator Sports

Lee, although she was fanatically against varsity sports for women because of their inherent abuses of commercialization, exploitation, and aggressive competition, did not condemn all competitive sports. The many physical education organizations to which Lee belonged all drew up anti-intercollegiate provisos, but each organization allowed varying degrees of competitive sports. The Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation was one of the strictest in not allowing any sports that might possibly exploit women. At one meeting, the group condemned private field hockey clubs for women that had sprung up in several cities. Lee, however, found the clubs to fulfill her ideals of women's sport. She outlined her specific qualms against competitive sports in the clubs' defense: "As they were all promoted and managed by the women players themselves and, as far as I could see, absolutely free of all taint of commercialization—all matches were surrounded by social amenities and devoid of intense desires to win at any cost—I could see no cause for criticizing these efforts. To me they represented sports in

⁵⁰ Ibid., 62-63.

an ideal situation, the sort of thing we all claimed we would not be against if it existed anywhere.⁵¹

To Lee, however, the field hockey club ideal was an exception; too many girls were still subject to the exploitative evils of intercollegiate competition. In the early 1930s, Lee conducted a survey of secondary schools in an attempt to find out which schools were most vulnerable to varsity competition. She concluded that thirty-nine percent of the 163 schools that she surveyed "were engaging in extramural sports for girls, with the highest percentage (49) occurring in the Class D, schools of the smallest towns."⁵² In the smaller schools that played basketball and volleyball almost exclusively, she concluded that "It is probably quite safe to assume that in these schools the only girls who were entered in the sports program were the highly skilled."⁵³ Yet smaller schools were exactly the ones to which inter-school sports appealed most. Lacking enough interested girls to field the two or more teams for intramural competition, the schools naturally turned to their neighboring institutions for opposing teams. Small communities also often relied upon high school sports for unity and entertainment, proudly supporting local teams as a community enterprise.⁵⁴

Olympics

Small high schools' predisposition to inter-school activity soon proved to be the least of Lee's worries. Nearing the 1932 Olympics, Lee had her hands full attempting to

⁵¹ Ibid., 225.

⁵² Ibid., 228.

⁵³ Ibid.

keep women out of the international competition. Women had participated in track and field events only since the previous Olympics in 1928, and the threatened expansion of track alarmed women physical educators. Events such as swimming, archery, and golf had been contested in previous Olympiads, but track represented a departure from the proper and acceptable women's sports of earlier years. Looked upon as "manly" and appealing to the lower social classes, track events caused Mabel Lee and her physical education friends to recoil in horror at the thought of modest girls parading, half-clothed, in front of millions of leering spectators.⁵⁵ For them, the situation had worsened since women's first track and field display at the 1922 Women's Olympics in Paris. The horror of the Paris meet had prompted Lee's friend and fellow Boston Normal School of Gymnastics graduate Blanche Trilling to write: "It is . . . surprising the apparently nice girls that are planning to go over [to Paris] in August—I can't see it."⁵⁶

When the Amateur Athletic Union, which became physical educators' primary foe in the battle against intercollegiate athletics for women, held its 1932 Olympic trials at the University of Nebraska, Lee heard from a "prominent local businessman who was 'in the know'" that the AAU planned to host a women's track team at the trials. "Alarmed about it, we women were furious since it was pure exploitation of girl athletes."⁵⁷ The AAU proved to be a determined adversary; Lee was unsuccessful in her attempt to get the them to drop the women's team from the trials. Lee and her professional friends

⁵⁴ Benjamin G. Rader, American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sport, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 111-112.

⁵⁵ Susan K. Cahn, Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 58.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 231.

underestimated women's desire to compete internationally and men's desire to control the process.

At a 1929 American Physical Education Association meeting, Dr. Percy Dawson spoke as an opponent of women's participation in Olympic games. Dr. Dawson, according to Lee, "pointed out the differences between the Greeks, who sought the development of all youth, and the Romans, who excelled in spectator sports with the few highly skilled developed for the entertainment of the multitudes. He begged us in all of our work to remember the Greeks rather than the Romans." His impassioned speech to a friendly audience of anti-intercollegiate physical educators prompted the APEA to pass a resolution condemning women's participation in the Olympics.⁵⁸

The APEA's resolution did nothing to stop the support of female Olympians, who entered the Games as scheduled. Defeated, Lee and her friends decided to travel to the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles "to observe carefully all we could and do whatever we could to learn about women in the Olympics."⁵⁹ Unimpressed, Lee clung to her opinion of competitive sports as modern evils, condemning the female victors as trashy, selfish, and hopelessly uncouth: "Of the women champions it was 'Babe' Didrikson and Stella Walsh who held most of our attention—the 'Babe' because of her bad manners, social ineptness, and poor sportsmanship, and Stella Walsh of Cleveland because of her controversial switch to enter as a member of the Polish women's team."⁶⁰ She added that Didrikson, arguably America's greatest female athlete of the twentieth century, "flashed

⁵⁸ Ibid., 96.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 224.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 224.

upon the athletic scene. She had great athletic skills and played them into the hands of men who pushed her for all she was worth to them to advance their own plans to take over women's sports for their own aggrandizement."⁶¹

Seeing Babe Didrikson only as a defector in what she perceived to be mainstream women's desire to keep sports tamed and non-competitive, Lee and her Women's Division friends could not realize the intense satisfaction women like Didrikson and Louise Pound enjoyed after a hard-won victory on a national stage. Purportedly representing women's athletic desires, Lee's physical education organizations did not truly represent all women, only the agenda of a small group of professionally-trained physical education instructors. The powerful physical educators thought that the expansion in women's sports came only from sleazy male promoters bent on showcasing scantily clad women for their own profit. They refused to believe that respectable middle class women also pressed for expanded athletic opportunities. In the 1940s, Lee still complained that "Some men were still trying to lure high school girls into the interschool sports field, patterned after boys' sports programs," but then admitted her circle's minority viewpoint, "Professionally-trained women were few, and these few were deeply committed to looking after the interests of the great majority of girls, not just the highly skilled."⁶²

Doing battle with the AAU again, Lee and the Women's Division attempted to stop sports tournaments for girls across the country sponsored by the AAU, "shamelessly

⁶¹ Mabel Lee, Lincoln Journal, 11 August 1984.

⁶² Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 385.

exploiting girl players and bringing in large gate receipts to the men sponsors.”⁶³ This move to stop girls’ tournaments incited comments by the AAU, accusing the Women’s Division of advocating a “destructive program and against all competition of girls in sports.”⁶⁴ Rebutting the comments, Lee wrote back to the AAU, stating, “While we women are most interested in THE GIRL herself, you men are most interested in the SPORT and champions.”⁶⁵ She believed her organizations condoned competitive sports, saying: “We were fighting to correct abuses and to abolish only the wrong kind of sports.”⁶⁶

In the late 1930s, Lee’s organizational stronghold began to fall apart. At a conference of the Athletic Federation of College Women, she was forced to lock horns with women leaders pushing for intercollegiate athletics for women.⁶⁷ The National Section on Women’s Athletics (NSWA), the APEA’s spin-off group first formed to research and publish Berenson’s “official” women’s basketball rules, also began to diverge from the strict Women’s Division philosophy. Revising their anti-varsity stand, the NSWA developed rules that would allow intercollegiate athletics “if varsity teams arose from a wide base of intramural sports and if the intercollegiate practices and matches did not interfere with the sports program of the vast majority of other girls interested in sports participation.” Saddened by yet another defection from her viewpoint, Lee rejected the NSWA’s new rules. She reasoned that allowing intercollegiate competition for women at the University of Nebraska would cause high

⁶³ Ibid., 232.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 233.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 74.

schools throughout the state, not staffed with professionally trained physical educators like herself, to emulate the University. Without proper supervision, the high school girls would fall back into the exploitative, unhealthy games from which Lee and her friends had just rescued them. Lee therefore "stood by the so very explicit standards of the Women's Division knowing that by so doing we were also adhering to NSWA standards but not taking advantage of its permissiveness for the temporary pleasure of a handful of highly-skilled sportswomen. As example-setters we didn't want to cause 'a younger sister' to stumble."⁶⁸

Ina Gittings

Lee succeeded in championing her philosophy in her small but powerful professional organizations, but not all women physical educators agreed with her. One notable woman physical educator who supported intercollegiate sports for women bore the additional distinction of being a close personal friend of Louise Pound's. Ina Gittings, a 1906 University of Nebraska graduate, had befriended Pound while serving as a star player on Pound's successfully managed basketball teams. She also gained fame as a track and field athlete, taking a class on the sport from Nebraska's Dr. R. G. Clapp.⁶⁹ Dr. Clapp photographed Gittings in a number of track and field postures which survive today as relics of a bygone era when Gittings ran hurdles and pole vaulted in boots, bloomers, and a pompadour. Three years after her graduation, Gittings served as Mrs.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 282.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 288-9.

⁶⁹ Eleanor Rice, "Ina Gittings Pole Vaults to Fame in 'The Revolt of American Women,'" The Arizona Daily Star, 28 November 1952.

Clapp's successor in the women's gymnasium until 1917.⁷⁰ Leaving Nebraska, Gittings moved to Arizona and taught physical education at the university there for thirty-two years. Like Lee, Gittings rescued the University of Arizona's foundering women's physical education program by expanding the solitary dance class to fourteen different activities, giving the girls a wide choice of activities to make them both "happy and healthy."⁷¹ Unlike Lee's brand of physical education, however, Gittings' department unabashedly produced tennis, golf, and swimming stars.⁷² Gittings, openly pro-intercollegiate, was unafraid of her powerful colleagues, their professional organizations, and their non-competitive philosophy. In 1931, she wrote an article entitled "Why Cramp Competition?" that spoke for the "large number of young instructors who are loath to come out flat footed against their directors who may not be in favor of Intercollegiate Competition."⁷³ In a 1956 letter to Louise Pound after a short trip to Lincoln, Gittings hinted at her professional differences with Lee, probably knowing of her old friend's distaste for Lee: "This week in Lincoln was a happy one. . . . I did have a chance to tell how my objectives for women's P.E. have been vindicated—above those of Alice Towne's, Mabel Lee's, etc."⁷⁴

Professional Competition

⁷⁰ Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 27.

⁷¹ "Gittings Retires from UA Staff," Tucson Daily Citizen, 8 June 1955.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Cahn, 71.

⁷⁴ Letter from Ina Gittings to Louise Pound, 18 November 1956, Nebraska State Historical Society archives.

Back on campus, Lee's struggle with Louise Pound continued. Both women, leaders in their own field, could not stand the thought that there was another woman on campus with as many professional laurels as herself. When Lee reorganized the Women's Athletic Association shortly after her arrival, the physical education majors printed a booklet in the spring of 1925 telling the story of the WAA, which Pound had run before Lee's arrival. Also contained in the booklet were constitutions of the Athletic Conference for American College Women, the constitution for the newly reorganized University of Nebraska WAA chapter, and the local program for the coming year. The girls dedicated it to Lee, saying "To Mabel Lee, Director of Physical Education for Women of the University of Nebraska, who stands as our living ideal of a sportswoman, do we lovingly dedicate this Constitution of the Women's Athletic Association."⁷⁵ The girls presented the first copy to Lee, and rushed to Louise Pound's office to give her the second, grateful for all the hours she had given them in previous years. According to Lee,

[Pound] took the booklet, read the dedication to me out loud with much sarcasm, and to the amazement of the girls, threw the booklet down on her desk in disgust exclaiming, "Sissy! Just a sissy!" For a split second there was dead silence. Then she picked up the booklet again and turned to the next page on which the officers of the WAA had recorded their beliefs about sports for women which ended with "We play for the fun of the game." Reading that entire statement too, out loud,

⁷⁵ Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 36.

with a second burst of disgust she threw the booklet down once more, exclaiming:

“Sissies! All sissies! Bah!”⁷⁶

Lee later comforted the startled girls who were, as yet, unaware of the deep discord between their two mentors. Lee remembered being “secretly delighted to sense their unshaken loyalty to Mary [Wheeler, Lee’s assistant] and me and our philosophy of sports.”⁷⁷ Pound later won out when in 1945 the WAA inducted her into their Hall of Fame as a life member, undoubtedly infuriating Mabel Lee. The Daily Nebraskan listed the reasons for Pound’s induction: “Because: she is by far the most renowned athlete ever turned out at Nebraska . . . she has patiently encouraged aspiring athletes and eager students for many years . . . she has that rare combination of intelligence and courage . . . But particularly because: she’s more fun than anybody on the campus and the best pitcher who ever whiffed an inshoot across the pan.”⁷⁸

In December 1930, Lee was elected president of the American Physical Education Association. Her nomination and election represented the first time a woman had ever headed the organization. Extremely proud of her pioneering role, she wrote:

This had not been a campaign of women against men with the women, at long last, putting their candidate over. My election had been proposed by a man and sponsored by the men. I had been nominated by a man and the nomination seconded by a man, and the men held the controlling votes, so that in a sense I was elected by the men although there was no opposing vote. The first woman

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁷⁸ Evelyn Simpson, “Louise Pound, Sports Champion . . . and Teacher,” Sunday World Herald Magazine, June 1945.

was stepping into the presidency seemingly with the complete backing of the men who had been in absolute control of the Association for 45 years. They were happy because it was their idea and their doing. The women were happy because at last a woman was recognized. As some of us talked it over later, not one of us know at the time a single mixed-sex national organization other than the National Education Association that had ever had a woman president.⁷⁹

Pound also became the first woman president of her national organization, the Modern Language Association, but that honor was not bestowed to her until twenty-five years later.

In 1937, Pound found another opportunity to strike at Lee. Lee had just published a physical education textbook entitled Conduct of Physical Education. A mysterious accuser charged that Lee had ordered her secretary to type the textbook on University time and with University funds. Not directly naming Pound, Lee described her suspected antagonist as having “up to this time been the only woman on the faculty whose publications hailed her as a recognized author in her field (although none of her writings was used as textbooks); apparently she was jealous of that reputation as the only woman author on campus and my book was now a threat to it.”⁸⁰ Pound had indeed published dozens of articles and essays prior to 1937, two of the earliest being “Strong Verbs and Preterite Present Verbs in Anglo-Saxon” in 1898 and “Questions on Tennyson’s ‘Lancelot and Elaine’” in 1901.⁸¹ Producing the receipt for the manuscript’s typing, Lee

⁷⁹ Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 148.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸¹ Publications found in the University of Nebraska Archives.

escaped ethics charges. Interest in the issue did not die out. According to Lee, another unknown accuser (probably still Pound), "complained to various members of the board of regents and apparently painted so black a picture of me abusing my position that it was agreed to make a ruling that no faculty member could use a textbook which he had authored or co-authored."⁸² Lee felt that the ruling was made especially for her and her book, but she was not alone in objecting to the new rule: so many faculty members protested that the board of regents overturned the action.

Years after Pound's death, Lee still felt the intense professional competition of their younger years. Receiving high honors shortly before her death, Pound was the first woman inducted into the Nebraska Sports Hall of Fame. In 1979, Lee was inducted into the Iowa Women's Sports Hall of Fame for her work in the field of physical education.⁸³ When an interviewer asked her about her confrontations with Louise Pound over the years, Lee commented, "She'll turn over in her grave when she hears that I've been inducted into the . . . Sports Hall of Fame."⁸⁴

Harassment

After several years of heated confrontations and squabbling, the Lee-Pound rivalry became menacing. Lee, who had never before "encountered so many snobs, so many people with chips on their shoulders, or so many special-privilege seekers" than she had in Lincoln, found Louise Pound and her well-connected friends to be irritating

⁸² Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 118.

⁸³ Lynn Hawkins, "Lee To Be First Nebraskan Inducted by Iowa Hall of Fame," Lincoln Star, 20 August 1979.

⁸⁴ Casaccio.

disruptions to her work.⁸⁵ Pound, herself a member of one of Lincoln's most prominent families, had built a network of highly-placed friends who would rally around her when she needed them. Mabel Lee represented a threat to Pound's alma mater, seeking to eradicate all traces of Nebraska's once-powerful women's varsity teams, and Pound aimed to eliminate the threat. While run-ins with difficult faculty members "all but broke [Lee's] spirit on several occasions,"⁸⁶ by the end of her career she faced more ominous problems.

In her autobiography, Lee related an incident that brought her struggles with Pound to a crescendo. Describing Pound as "outspoken and vindictive,"⁸⁷ she said that in their final battle, the now-retired Pound enlisted the support of a group of women in Lincoln, all University of Nebraska alumnae, that Lee "came to recognize as a well organized hate group aimed at making things as uncomfortable for me as possible."⁸⁸ In the past, the physical education department had been directly under the chancellor. By 1946, however, the department had been moved to the Teacher's College. The privilege Lee had enjoyed in previous years of speaking directly to the chancellor about her problems evaporated in the move, placing her under the unsympathetic Dean Frank E. Henzlik at the Teacher's College.

For several years before she retired, Lee received harassing telephone calls. As the harassment increased, she suspected that she "was under some sort of police

⁸⁵ Lee, Beyond Bloomers, 38.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 422.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

surveillance.”⁸⁹ Finding no relief from either situation, Lee then began receiving anonymous letters, finding that letters were being sent to her friends and acquaintances on the physical education department letterhead. The letters were typed with Mabel Lee’s forged signature at the bottom. No two letters that friends ever passed on to Lee were ever the same. Forged-letter recipients found the notes to be so strange that they often asked Lee what she was thinking when she wrote them, only to find that she had not written the letters at all. In the last few weeks of the spring term in 1952, her last year at the University, Lee’s troubles mounted until she was finally summoned by Chancellor Gustavson. Some man had told the chancellor that Lee was in danger, apparently overhearing threats being made against her.⁹⁰ The chancellor invited Lee to tell him her long story of difficulties with Louise Pound, ultimately sending her to a psychiatrist for advice. According to Lee, Chancellor Gustavson decided that for her protection, she was to be escorted to and from campus every day by a plainclothes police man. She was never to be alone anyplace, except in her office, and only then if the door was locked. Lee alerted her neighbors that if they saw anyone strange, to call the police.⁹¹

The forged letters increased. The chancellor called in handwriting experts who failed to unravel the identity or identities of the mysterious forgers, although Lee guessed at one probable suspect. Several years later, after her retirement, Lee learned that a former student of hers had received one of the forged letters and was so horrified that she never again spoke to Lee. The letter, purportedly written by Lee, told the former student

⁸⁹ Ibid., 423.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 424.

"that I [Lee] was doing research on the subject of homosexuality (a word which no respectable woman at that time would utter in the presence of either man or woman) and that I suspected a friend of hers of being homosexual and would she spy on her and report to me what she had learned about her."⁹² For years afterward, whenever someone acted strangely toward her, Lee wondered if they had received one of the forged letters.⁹³

Trying to minimize damage caused to her reputation by the forged letters, Lee sent out her own letters denying involvement in the strange scheme. One handwritten letter to a friend said:

If perchance you have ever received at any time any sort of communication purported to be from me that seems queer in any way or that may (even though not queer) be signed in my name but in a handwriting that does not seem to be mine, will you be so kind as to send it to me at once for inspection. I have already received a few, and you can imagine that I am quite bewildered to think that any one would be interested in signing my name to letters or postcards which I have not written.

If you yourself have not received any such communication but you know of persons who have, will you be so kind as to ask them to send it to me, envelope as well as note paper, if at all possible, or ask them to give it to you to send to me. You will be doing me a great personal favor, I can assure you. . . . Thank you for your help in this annoying problem.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

P.S. . . . The above is embarrassing but must be done. If you have any information on anyone's attempting to undermine our department work, I would appreciate your passing it on to me. It has assumed too large proportion to be ignored now and is damaging to all of us. Would be most grateful for your help.⁹⁴

The University of Nebraska's archives contain nothing to corroborate Lee's autobiographical telling of this incident except the above letter from Lee to a colleague. It is possible that Lee greatly exaggerated the threat to her person to elicit sympathy for herself and her department at the frustrating end to her long career.

Title IX

Louise Pound died in 1958, not living long enough to see her position vindicated. Mabel Lee, however, retired from the University in 1952, lived another thirty-three years, long enough to see all her anti-intercollegiate work unraveled. Title IX of the Educational Amendments act of 1972 prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex by universities and other schools receiving federal funds; in essence allowing women to form fully funded varsity teams.⁹⁵ Growing slowly at first due to challenges to Title IX, women's varsity athletics grew in popularity. By the 1980s, women's athletics had nearly caught up to the more than one hundred-year history of men's varsity athletics. Not swayed in her stance, Mabel Lee remained outspoken until her death, continuing to condemn intercollegiate athletics for women as physically and socially harmful to the

⁹⁴ Mabel Lee, letter to Miss Hellner, 26 July 1951, Lincoln, Nebraska, University of Nebraska Archives.

⁹⁵ Cahn, 250.

women athletes. In a 1979 interview, the ninety-three year old Lee bitterly commented that Title IX forced women to re-fight old battles:

... HEW (the Health, Education and Welfare Department) is all wet by their interpretation of what's meant by equal. Our girls are being forced against their own natures. Now we have to fight our own government to realize girls are not the same as boys. All we want is equal opportunity to play our own games—not the same games boys do. . . . I wish the government would keep out and let the educators run this again. Then we could get out of the rat and dog race that imitates men's sports.⁹⁶

In another interview, Lee implied that Title IX and the women's liberation movement were not controlled by women, or if they were, not by mainstream women. Perhaps believing that well-meaning men were trying to placate demanding left-wing women with the recent legislative measures, she maintained that the new laws were not designed with women's desires in mind: "[Title IX is] forcing things we women don't even want. Women's lib has done a lot, we have to thank them for that, but they have gone too far to the left on some things."⁹⁷

Shocked by the direction of women's sports, Lee further condemned the recent trend in awarding athletic scholarships to women as simply copying men's sports. She wanted University of Nebraska teams to be for students enrolled for an education, "not just because somebody wants to pay them to perform a sport."⁹⁸ She said that women in

⁹⁶ Hawkins.

⁹⁷ Ann Schrader, "Coe May Queen Stays 'In the Thick of Things,'" Cedar Rapids Gazette, 24 May 1976.

⁹⁸ Hawkins.

her profession had been almost unanimous in rejecting scholarships and had even adopted a resolution stating their position: "Misunderstandings started when the court awarded to a female athlete an athletic scholarship despite the fact that the majority of women already had gone on record in opposition of athletic scholarships for women."⁹⁹ By the late 1970s, women's intercollegiate athletics had become a permanent part of the University. The physical educators wanted women's sports assigned to their department, feeling that athletics were just a small part of the overall field of physical education. Instead, the University assigned the sports to the athletic department with men's sports. Lee said that reading about young varsity athletes left her "sick to [her] stomach. Education doesn't stand for the kind of activities that injure people. That isn't education. It's intemperance."¹⁰⁰

Title IX led to striking changes in the University's women's athletics department. June Davis, Nebraska's women's athletics director for much of the Title IX transition, remembered that in 1975, her first year at the University, "Our total budget . . . was \$37,384. And that included our salaries. We didn't have any coaches except people from the P.E. department, who had been coaching at the intramural or club level."¹⁰¹ Gradually staffing teams with full-time coaches, the department began to take shape. Ten years later, their budget was \$3.1 million.¹⁰²

Most of the underlying reasons for the animosity between Louise Pound and Mabel Lee could be traced back to what each thought would be the support of either

⁹⁹ Shannon Anderson, "Lee Speaks Out on Sports," Daily Nebraskan, 31 August, 1979.

¹⁰⁰ Anita Fussell, "Lee, 93, Still Running Ahead of Pack," Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 23 March 1980.

¹⁰¹ Virgil Parker, "Female Athletics Takes a 'Giant Leap,'" Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 7 April 1985.

¹⁰² Ibid.

physical education or intramural sports at the expense of the other activity. Lee worried that allowing varsity sports would satisfy the best athletes who made the small teams but would leave the majority of women out of sports for life. She prided herself on a statistic showing that only three percent of the women on campus participated in intramural sports when she arrived on Nebraska's campus in 1924, but that 81 percent were participating when she retired in 1952.¹⁰³ Lee's worries about varsity sports proved to be unfounded. Varsity sports at the high school level and earlier actually increased intramural participation at the college level. A campus recreation director noted that girls who had participated in competitive sports at an earlier age but lacked the skills to make an exclusive college team turned to intramural sports for recreation, continuing to play games or sports that they had for years enjoyed.¹⁰⁴

In the end, both women earned a prominent place at the University of Nebraska. Pound was posthumously honored in 1963, when one of the twin towers of a new dormitory was named after her, with her friend and classmate Willa Cather supplying the name for the other tower.¹⁰⁵ In 1977, years after her battle with Louise Pound over a new women's physical education building and even after her retirement, Mabel Lee finally got her new building. Loyal former students rallied to have the building named after their pioneering mentor.¹⁰⁶ Dedicated to her profession until the end, ninety-seven year old Lee uttered a final complaint about what she felt was undue emphasis on intercollegiate

¹⁰³ Casaccio.

¹⁰⁴ Virgil Parker, "Lee Helped Spark Women's Sports Explosion While at NU," Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 8 December 1985.

¹⁰⁵ "Towers To Be Named For Pound, Cather," Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 3 February 1963.

¹⁰⁶ Jack Kennedy, "'Bloomer Girl' Gets Honor," Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 20 February 1977.

athletics in 1983. True to her Victorian upbringing, she said, "I want to blast away, but that isn't becoming for someone with her name on a building."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Don Pieper, "Fitness Expert Far From Being A 'Dud,'" Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 11 September 1983.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources: Books

Clapp, Anne Barr. "Women's Athletics." The Cornhusker, 1924.

The Cornhusker. University of Nebraska yearbook, 1907.

---. 1924.

---. 1928.

---. 1929.

"Directors of Women's Sports." The Cornhusker. University of Nebraska yearbook, 1925.

Lee, Mabel. Memories of a Bloomer Girl. Washington, D.C.: The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, 1977.

---. Memories Beyond Bloomers. Washington, D.C.: The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, 1978.

Pound, Louise. Selected Writings of Louise Pound. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971.

The Sombrero. University of Nebraska yearbook, 1892.

---. 1902.

Primary Sources: Articles

Anderson, Shannon. "Lee Speaks Out on Sports." Daily Nebraskan, 31 August 1979.

Casaccio, E. K. "The Incredible 'Miss Lee:' In a Continuing Story." Daily Nebraskan, 18 November 1977, sec. B.

Dukes, Mark. "91-year-old Mabel Lee is First Women Named to Coe 'Hall.'" Cedar Rapids Gazette, 23 October 1977.

Fussell, Anita. "Miss Lee, 93, Still Running Ahead of Pack." Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 23 March 1980.

Hawkins, Lynn. "Lee to Be First Nebraskan Inducted by Iowa Hall of Fame." Lincoln Star, 20 August 1979.

Heinz, Tina. "Nebraskan's Suitcases Hold 93 Years of Memories." Omaha World-Herald, 7 October 1979.

Kennedy, Jack. "'Bloomer Girl' Gets Honor." Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 20 February 1977.

Lackey, Patrick. "Cedar Rapids Woman Still Fit at 89." Des Moines Register, 29 May 1976.

Lee, Mabel. Lincoln Journal. 11 August 1984.

---. "Field Hockey," Lincoln Journal. 26 September 1975.

Longman, Anne. "Louise Pound '47 Recipient Of Annual Kiwanis Club Medal." Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 9 November 1947.

"Louise Pound Named to Journal's Sports Hall of Fame." Lincoln Journal clippings file, unknown specific date, February 1955.

"Louise Pound, The Athlete," unknown source, Lincoln Journal Star, 13 November 1975.
Copied in part from a 1956 Louise Pound letter in the Nebraska State Historical Society archives, Louise Pound collection.

"Miss Gittings Retires from UA Staff." Tucson Daily Citizen, 8 June 1955.

"Miss Lee Elected Head of Directors." Daily Nebraskan 24, no. 123 (16 April 1925).

"Modern Girls Should Turn to Homemaking." Daily Nebraskan 31, no. 92 (23 February 1932).

Parker, Virgil. "Female Athletics Takes a 'Giant Leap.'" Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 7 April 1985.

---. "Lee Helped Spark Women's Sports Explosion While at NU." Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 8 December 1985.

Pieper, Don. "Fitness Expert Far From Being a 'Dud.'" Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 11 September 1983.

Polly. "In Basket Ball, Athletic Young Women Indulge in a Rough Game, No Weaklings are Allowed." Chicago Sunday Times-Herald, 14 August 1898. University of

Nebraska archives.

Pound, Roscoe. "My Sister Louise." Omaha World-Herald, 21 July 1957.

Rice, Eleanor. "Ina Gittings Pole Vaults to Fame in 'The Revolt of American Women.'" The Arizona Daily Star, 28 November 1952.

Schrader, Ann. "Coe May Queen Stays 'In the Thick of Things.'" Cedar Rapids Gazette, 24 May 1976.

Schrag, Gretchen. "Miss Pound, English Professor, Reveals Tales of Times When She Had Tennis, Bicycle, Golf Titles." Daily Nebraskan 31, no. 92 (23 February 1932).

Simpson, Evelyn. "Louise Pound, Sports Champion . . . and Teacher." [Omaha] Sunday World Herald Magazine, June 1945, sec. C.

"Women Finalists in City Golf Tourney Rivals in Lincoln Sports for 25 Years." Lincoln Sunday Star, 3 October 1926.

Primary Sources: Other Materials

Clapp, Anne Barr, and Louise Pound. "Girls' Basket Ball in the University of Nebraska, Decennial Souvenir, 1896-1906." June 1906. Nebraska State Historical Society archives.

"Contract" between Louise Pound and Marguerite McPhee. University of Nebraska archives.

Fisher, Dorothy Canfield. Letter to Olivia Pound, 7 July 1958. Records of Dr. Sue Rosowski, Dept. of English, University of Nebraska.

Gittings, Ina. Letter to Louise Pound, 18 November 1956. Nebraska State Historical Society archives.

Lee, Mabel. Letter to Miss Hellner, 26 July 1951. University of Nebraska archives.

---. Letter to Chancellor Gustavson, 12 February 1952. University of Nebraska archives.

Meredith, Mamie Jane. Letter to Mr. Max J. Herzberg, editor of Work Study, 9 May 1938. University of Nebraska archives.

---. "The Pound Family of Lincoln, Nebraska." 24 May 1964, University of Nebraska

archives.

Pound, Louise. Letter to her relatives while at the Western tennis championships at the University of Chicago, September 1897. Nebraska State Historical Society archives.

---. "My Happiest Christmas--." Nebraska State Historical Society archives, Louise Pound Collection.

Pound, Olivia? "Family Portrait." University of Nebraska Archives.

"Rules for Basket Ball for Women as played in the University of Nebraska." Edited by Mrs. R. G. Clapp (director of the Women's Gymnasium) and Miss Louise Pound (manager of the women's team). Lincoln: 1904. Nebraska State Historical Society archives.

Secondary Sources: Books

Cahn, Susan K. Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth Century Women's Sport. New York, The Free Press, 1994.

Haller, Evelyn Harris. "Pound, Louise, June 30, 1872—June 28, 1958." Notable American Women: The Modern Period, A Biographical Dictionary." Edited by Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Green. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980.

Knoll, Robert E. Prairie University: A History of the University of Nebraska. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

Lucas, John A., and Ronald A. Smith. Saga of American Sport. Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1978.

Manley, Robert N. Centennial History of the University of Nebraska: I. Frontier University (1869-1919). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969.

Secondary Sources: Articles

Alexander, Hartley. "Louise Pound." Nebraska Alumnus, October 1933, 3-4.

Becker, Dick. "No Sissy, She," Nebraska Alumnus 46, no 3 (March 1955).

"Benefits of Directed Physical Education Outlined by Miss Lee." Unknown review of

Lee's book Conduct of Physical Education, 7 February 1938?, Lincoln Journal Star files.

Botkin, B. A. "Book Review: Selected Writings of Louise Pound." Midwest Folklore 1, no. 1 (1951).

Botkin, B. A. "First Lady of Letters: Retrospective—1957." Roundup: A Nebraska Reader. Edited by Virginia Faulkner. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1957.

Botkin, B. A. "Louise Pound (1872-1956)." Western Folklore 18, no 3 (July 1959).

Botkin, B. A. "Pound Sterling: Letters from a 'Lady Professor.'" Prairie Schooner 33 no. 1 (1959).

Coe, Lulu Mae. "Physical Education Has Taught Nebraska Girls to Breathe and Sensible Reforms in Dress and Posture Have Resulted." Lincoln Sunday Star, 13 March 1927, sec. D.

"Louise Pound Embodied 1890 'New Woman' Idea." The Journalist, 17 November 1976.

Louise Pound Memorial Committee. Names 7, no. 1 (March 1959). University of Nebraska archives.

Montoye, Henry J. "Our Profession Has An Inferiority Complex." The Black and Gold Bulletin 40 (The Phi Epsilon Kappa Fraternity Newsletter), no. 1 (October 1976).

Rogers, Dr. Frederick Rand. "Olympics for Girls?" School and Society 30 (10 August 1929).

Roth, Dr. Linda Gage. "Are Sports HARMFUL to Women?" The Forum 81 (May 1929).

Turner, Elizabeth A. "Legacy Profile: Louise Pound (1872-1958)." Legacy 9, no. 1 (1992).

"Towers To Be Named For Pound, Cather." Lincoln Sunday Journal Star, 3 February 1963.

Walton, Don. "Louise Pound, and Boston on the Plains." Lincoln Star, 8 June 1988.

Yost, Nellie Snyder. "Nebraska's Scholarly Athlete: Louise Pound, 1872-1958." Nebraska History 64 (1983).

Secondary Sources: Other Materials

Hult, Joan S. Play Day expert, personal interview via e-mail, 16 April 1999.

Louise Pound file, Nebraska State Historical Society. Introduction to record RG0912.

Scott, Effie Leese. "An Appreciation: Louise Pound." Unknown publication, possibly part of a program for Louise Pound's Kiwanis Medal award ceremony. Lincoln Journal Star clippings file.

Unknown writing, possibly the slipcover to Pound's Selected Writings. University of Nebraska archives.